Good Thoughts on Folklore and Mythology
Festschrift in Honour of Terry Gunnell

Volume 2. MYTHOLOGY

Edited by
Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, Felix Lummer, Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir,
Katrin Lisa van der Linde Mikaelsdóttir
and Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir

TRIVENT

TRIVENT
PUBLISHING

Professor Terry Gunnell

Good Thoughts on Folklore and Mythology

Festschrift in Honour of Terry Gunnell

- Volume 2. Mythology -

Edited by

Ingunn Ásdísardóttir
Felix Lummer
Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir
Katrín Lísa van der Linde Mikaelsdóttir
Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir

Old Norse Studies, vol. 1.2

© Trivent Publishing, 2025

Good Thoughts on Folklore and Mythology. Festschrift in Honour of Terry Gunnell. Volume 1.2. Folklore
Eds. Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, Felix Lummer, Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir, Katrín Lísa van der Linde Mikaelsdóttir, Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir

eISBN 978-615-6696-83-0
Old Norse Studies
Responsible publisher: Teodora C. Artimon
https://trivent-publishing.eu/104-old-norse-studies

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

The publisher used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live.

First published in 2025 by Trivent Publishing

Trivent Publishing
1119 Budapest, Etele ut 59–61, Hungary
For more information, visit our website: http://trivent-publishing.eu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Voluspå – Broen fra hedendom til kristendom 9
Gro Steinsland

De natura deorum: Few Theses on Gods and Pantheons 17
Jan A. Kozák

Hvers konar heimild er Edda? 26
Gísli Sigurðsson

Í dyngju kvenna 34
Heimir Pálsson

Life, Death and a Warrior's Morality 46
Declan Taggart

Technology in Old Norse Myth: The Case of *Snorra Edda* 62
Jens Eike Schnall

Gods, Dwarves, and Humans: *Vǫluspá* Sts. 9–18 76
Rory McTurk

Fannst det kvinnelege einherjur, og kva var i tilfelle dei mytologiske implikasjonane? 87
Else Mundal

Valkyries Propagating, Propagating Valkyries: A Mythological Feedback Loop 95
Luke John Murphy

Spittle-Man and the Talking Head: Hostages, Boundaries, and Transformations in the Peace Settlement of the *æsir* and *vanir* 112
John Lindow

Hœnir – Being a Chicken in Old Norse 124
Karen Bek-Pedersen, Benjamin Weber Pedersen

Why is Eggþér Happy – and who is he? On the Herder and the Roosters in *Vǫluspá* 42–43, with Digressions on Harps and Gosling-Trees 136
Henning Haglskær Kure

Nerthus f. > *Njǫrðr m.:* A Speculative Proposal 147
Stefan Brink

Hyrrokkin – Monster or Mighty Priestess? 159
Ingunn Ásdísardóttir

A Dragon Is No Idle Fancy: Loki's Spawn and Thor's Bane 166
Ármann Jakobsson

Valhöll í íslensku landslagi 173
Svavar Sigmundsson

Recognizing the Sacrality of Helgafell 182
Thomas A. DuBois

"Everything in Rings is Bound": The Foundation Myth of Gotland 195
Olof Sundqvist

Cattle, Snakes, and Milk: Decoding Western Slavic Jewellery from the Viking Age 210
Leszek Gardeła

From Artefacts to Ritual Drama: Revisiting Käring(a)sjön in Halland 227
Anders Andrén

Runic Poetry as Oral Poetry: Some Formulae from the Viking Age 235
Simon Nygaard

Gátur Gestumblinda: Leikrænn þáttur í *Heiðreks sögu* 252
Vésteinn Ólason

When a God Dreams: *hví væri Baldri ballir draumar* 263
Stephen A. Mitchell

The Performance of *Hárbarðsljóð* – but Isn't that Your Line? 275
Frog

Forging Occasions: Exploring the Performative Framework in *skáldasögur* 288
Inés García López

Dangerous Women by the Shore: Reading *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* through Graeco-Roman Myth and Legend 298
Camilla Asplund Ingemark

Old Norse Worlds in *The Northman* 308
Neil Price

Góðar hugsanir frá Bandamönnum 319
Sveinn Einarsson

The Works of Terry Gunnell 321

VOLUSPÅ – BROEN FRA HEDENDOM TIL KRISTENDOM

Gro Steinsland*

Kjære Terry

Gratulerer med takk for møtepunkter og faglig inspirasjon gjennom årene. Særskilt takk for Voluspå-seminaret Reykjavik 2008, planlagt av deg, Annette og Pétur, samt artikkelsamlingen som kom i bokform 2013: «The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vóluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement», edited by Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen. Ettersom plassen min er begrenset, legger jeg denne boken til grunn og sparer noteplass. Reykjavik-seminaret 2008 samlet en tverrfaglig forskergruppe om ett eneste edda-dikt: Voluspå. Det viste seg å være et godt valg.

Bokens forskningsbidrag er ordnet i kategoriene muntlig og skriftlig tradisjon og speiler det fruktbare spennet i Voluspå-forskingen. Med dette signaliseres ulike syn på dateringen av diktet. I invitasjonen til seminaret inngikk en utfordring til deltakerne: Hva med visuelle påvirkningskanaler for diktet? Tentativt ble det pekt på den forsvunne middelalder-katedralen på Hólar ved dens reminisenser av et Dommedags-panel. Kunne deltagerne reflektere over dette materialet som en mulig ikonografisk inspirasjonskanal for Voluspå?

Mitt bidrag hørte hjemme i kategorien *The Written Tradition* og fra artiklene der fremgår det at den klassiske sibyllen synes å ha kommet for å bli i Voluspå-forskningen. Sibyllens inntreden på nordisk grunn er et gammelt, fortrengt tema i Voluspå-forskningen, men viser seg nå å ha vendt tilbake med styrke. Historien om den fortrengte sibyllen og hennes tilbakekomst følger sporene av min egen reise med diktet.

* Professor emeritus, Universitet i Oslo.

En bekjennelse

Men først en bekjennelse ad inspirasjon fra Terry: Hans aldri hvilende påminnelse om at vi må våkne, at vi må løfte blikket fra våre papirer, skrivepulter, bøker, skrivemaskiner, pc-er, biblioteker der vi alle sitter murende stille. Vi må erkjenne at fortidens diktning ikke ble skapt for individuell innenatlesning som om det primært dreier seg om litteratur! Vi må innse at dikt ble fremført, at stor diktning naturlig var gjenstand for *performance*. Hvert ord valgt med omhu fordi det hadde lyd, trykk, rytme, fordi diktet bar frem mytologiske scener som krevde plass, gester, kropp, bevegelse, rom, hall, scene, publikum. Vi må slutte å behandle norrøn diktning som døde sommerfugler på nålespisser – blås liv i kunstverkene!

Din oppfordring har vært der som et *memento* hele veien, men det var neimen ikke lett å etterkomme i den travle akademiske hverdagen. Jeg visste at det hele tiden heftet en mangel ved oss – for vi kom oss ikke bort fra papirene, pc-ene, skrivebordene, forelesningssalene uten scene. Vi ble sittende til tross for at våre rygger ville hatt bedre kår om vi hadde reist oss og oppført noen tablåer, tonesatt noe musikk. Der ligger opplagt muligheter i en flerfaglighet der folkloristikken sidestilles med filologien og de historiefaglige disiplinene. Planer om *performance* må inn i budsjettforslagene! Med 2013-boken og din sterke artikkel der med illustrative avsnitt ad diktets komposisjon aner jeg at vi i fremtiden vil strekke oss etter levende sommerfugler.

Forholdet mellom *historie* i historiefagene og *minne* i folkeminne og folkloristikk trenger for øvrig drøftelser. Historiefagene har ut fra autoriteten som hefter ved skrevne kilder fått forme de store fortellingene, bestemme hvordan fortiden så ut. Fagområder som er rikere på muntlige kilder og personlige tradenter tillegges ikke den samme type autoritet. I kontakt med folkeminneforskere ble jeg selv klar over mitt eget oppheng i det historiefaglige, der all tolkning roper på feste i et daterbart historieforløp. Jeg ble forstyrret av det jeg opplevde som folkloristenes mangel på interesse for datering. Religionshistorikeren i meg søkte daterbare svar. Men hvorfor må alt dateres? Skulle jeg startet mitt akademiske liv på nytt, ville jeg åpne meg for folkloristikkens annerledeshet i vendingen mot det allment humane, mot det fenomenologiske. Jeg aner at Terry sitter inne med en høyere visdom enn min. «How High was the High One? The Role of Ódinn in Pre-Christian Icelandic Society» spør Terry i en artikkel der han retter pekefingeren mot min lærebok i norrøn religion – der Odin som sedvanlig presenteres som elitenes guddom. Terry viser gjennom analyse av en rekke mer lokale/regionale tradisjoner at Odin glimrer med sitt nærvær på Island. Dette visste jeg jo fra før, men var ikke rede til å sprenge modernitetens såkalt «store fortelling» med det. Det er først nå, som erkjennende post-modernist, at jeg setter den store fortellingen til side og leter etter det som forstyrrer. Og det er først nå, i emeritus-alder, at jeg har kjent på friheten til å være med og skape andre formidlingsformer enn den lærde artikkelen eller den statiske utstillingen. Jeg skal gi et lite glimt av det til sist. Først må jeg presentere en eldre forsker som kom til å bety så mye for min egen ferd i Voluspå-forskningen. Det gjelder Anton Christian Bang som ble forsøkt tiet ihjel som Voluspå-forsker. Hans påvisning av

sammenhenger mellom klassisk kultur, tidlig kristendom i For-Orienten og kristendommens komme til Norden passet ikke inn i tiden.

Anton Christian Bang og sibyllene

Det var dr. theol. og sogneprest Anton Christian Bang (1840–1913) som sist på 1800-tallet oppdaget at Voluspå er et norrønt sibylledikt, i innhold og form sterkt preget av klassiske og tidligkristne spådommer lagt i munnen på sibyller, oldtidens, hellenismens og urkristendommens karakteristiske spåkvinner. Da Bang komparerte Voluspá med et utvalg klassiske sibyllespådommer oversatt fra gresk til latin, fant han forbløffende overensstemmelser. Han konkluderte med at «Volvens spådom» er en norrøn parallell til samlinger av gresk/latinske spådomstekster, *Oraculum Sibyllae*, ja, *Oraculum* og *spá* er språklig sett identiske ord. Den norrøne volven fremsto som en utgave av den klassiske sibyllen. De mytiske skikkelsene presenterer seg med samme alder, ni verdener har de sett oppstå og forgå, deres spådommer når menneskene i den tiende verdensepoke. Spådommene eller profetiene er formet som såkalte *vaticinium ex eventu*, fiktive fremtidsprofetier som var så troverdig formet at de tidlige kirkefedrene anså dem som ekte spådommer som omhandlet hedenskapets sammenbrudd og kristendommens seiersrike fremtid. Det er stadig en opplevelse å fordype seg i Bangs artikler. Men selv fikk han ikke støtte i samtiden. Sophus Bugge var en av få som ga tilslutning til hans arbeider. I ettertid ser man at tiden ikke var moden for sibyllene. Den nordiske og germanske forskningen hegnet om det særegne.

Litt mer om sibyllene

Den sibyllinske orakeldiktningen kan spores tilbake til aleksandrinsk jødedom fra 200-tallet f. Kr. En rekke skrifter i form av orakler langt i munnen på en vis, hedensk spåkvinne, sibylle, brakte jødiske ideer i omløp i den multikulturelle fororientalske verden. Genren produserte flere personifiserte sibyller, med hjemsteder henlagt til Hellas, Italia og Lilleasia. Mest kjent ble den erytreiske sibyllen. Samlinger av sibylle-orakler ble oppbevart i Jupiter-tempelet i Roma. Den erytreiske sibyllens spådom om Kristus ble et av genrens mest berømte orakelord. Teksten ble mye brukt i den tidlige kirkens trosforsvar og hadde en høy stjerne i middelalderen, særlig etterat Augustin la stor vekt på den, jfr. *De Civitate Dei*, 18,23. Vergil reproduserte et stykke av den cumaeiske sibyllens orakel i sin *IV. Ekloge* om barnet som skal komme til verden. Passasjen ble mye nyttet av oldkirken som Kristus-profeti i form av forventninger om en ideal fremtidsfyrste.

Ung student betatt av sibyllen

Som ung student innen faget religionshistorie støtte jeg tidlig på Anton Christian Bangs syn på Voluspå som et sibylle-inspirert verk. Jeg var blitt fortrolig med den eskatologisk-apokalyptiske konteksten til urkristendommen – som jo ble aksentuert i kristen

forkynnelse under religionsmøtet her nord. Bangs brilliante analyser som i artikkelen «Voluspaa og de Sibyllinske Orakler», publisert 1879 – og flere publisert av Videnskabsselskabet i Christiania, virket overbevisende. For meg åpnet det seg en fascinerende ideverden rundt den tidlige kristendommen, et stort og mektig stoff og en spennende sammenheng mellom Fororientens kultur og Norden.

Med ett ben i religionshistorien og ett på marsj mot norrønfilologien oppsøkte jeg norrønfagets professor med spørsmål om jeg kunne skrive magisteroppgave om sibyllene og Voluspå. Skuffelsen var stor da den vennlige, lærde mann bestemt ristet på hodet og sa at det kunne jeg glemme! Det fantes ikke en eneste forsker som satte lit til Bangs hypoteser. De var for lengst avvist – for det fantes ikke kildemessige mellomledd mellom sibyllen og volven. Det var ikke annet å gjøre enn å trekke seg tilbake til urkristendommens mangfoldige verden hvor sibyllene jo hørte hjemme. Men etter hvert lengtet jeg nordover, lengtet hjem, og Voluspå – norrønt diktverk i verdensklasse - lokket som en mulig kilde til kristning og religionsskiftet her hjemme.

Reisen med Voluspå: Verdenstreet, Ask og Embla, *Imago dei*, Fremtidsfyrsten

Min egen forskningsreise i Voluspå har foregått som myteanalyse, på papir. Men reisen ble spennende nok for meg ettersom jeg foretok tematiske dypdykk og fikk artikler publisert i ærverdige *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*. Først temaet VERDENSTREET, Yggdrasil, livstreet som måler tid og rom og spenner over hele diktet (1979). Treet fra før skapelse som frø i en muld som ennå ikke er skapt, til det fullvoksne treet over Urds kilde, der urparet Ask og Embla trer frem. Treet som følger verdensutviklingen og trues og ynker seg inn mot Ragnaroks redsler. Treet som går til grunne med alt det skapte, men som i en mytisk fremtid skal reise seg på nytt. Det slo meg at treet som hovedsymbol i Voluspås struktur danner parallell til tresymbolet i Bibelen. Treet som brer seg fra den andre skapelsesmytens to trær i Paradishagen til apokalypsens Livstre som bugner av frukt i det himmelske Jerusalems evighet i *Johannes Åpenbaring*. Treet, rommet og tiden, nåtid omspunnet av fortid og fremtid. Glimt av et sirkulært kosmisk tidsspenn forut for sibyllens åpenbaring. Men i diktets nåtid er verdensforløpet satt inn i en ramme av lineær tid fra urtid over endetid til ny eon, fremtid. Folkereligionens sykliske tidsløp overvunnet av den lineære tid som regelen er i jødedom og kristendom.

ANTROPOGONIMYTEN i Voluspå hadde ligget og lokket med sine egenarter, i norrøn diktning er det bare Voluspå som rommer en regelrett antropogoni-myte. Analyse om Ask og Embla publisert 1983. Oppdagelsen av et mulig *imago dei*-element i antropogonien ble så skjellsettende at den måtte fordypes og publisering innenfor ny ramme av den tredelte antropogoni (2001). Med antropogoni-mytens «gudelikhet» a la *imago dei*, gudebilledligheten i Genesis 1. Mosebok, nærmet Voluspå seg Bibelens skapelsesmytologi i en grad som sprengte min gamle professors advarsler mot Bibel og Bangs sibylle-teori. I mellomtiden hadde jeg frimodig presentert sibyllene i flerfoldige foredrag hjemme og ute.

FREMTIDSFYRSTEN – Str. 63 (H) Da kommer herskeren til sitt herredømme, kraftfull ovenfra, han som allting rår.

Voluspås apokalypse, undergangstema og fremtidstema fremsto mer og mer påtrengende som en gjenklang av bibelsk og sibyllinsk skapelses- og undergangstematikk. Voluspås fremtidsvisjon slik den foreligger i Hauksbok, strofen som ikke er kommet med i Regius-versjonen, er stadig en ikke-avsluttet debatt i forskningen. Svaret kan bare avgis kontekstuelt, som svar på et spørsmål om strofen hører hjemme innenfor diktets helhet. Voluspå er et apokalyptisk dikt, strofene som avslutter Hauksbok-versjonen, er et naturlig endepunkt for spådommen, også for Regius-versjonen. Sibyllens spådom ender med fremblikk mot «Han som skal komme», Kristus som fremtidens herre. Fremtidsvisjonen er formet som *vaticinium ex eventu* i kjent sibylle-stil. Fremtidsfyrsten presenteres riktignok i ordelag som peker mot Heimdall, den merkelige guden som er knyttet til himmelhvelvet og har opphav utenfor gudeverdenen. Spørsmålet om en dobbel, skjult lesemulighet a la sibyllens, vil falle på plass innenfor sibyllens/volvens dulgte talemåte.

Hverken volven eller sibyllen kan røpe fremtidsfyrstens navn, hennes kompetanse og frihet når sin grense, fremtidsherskerens identitet forblir skjult. Navnet røpes ikke hverken i Hauksbok eller Regius og heller ikke i de få andre norrøne apokalyptiske kildene, Hyndluljod og Gylfaginning som det ikke er plass til å presentere her. Annetsteds har jeg arbeidet med det såkalte «korte Voluspå» i Hyndluljod, et dikt som jeg i motsetning til de fleste anser for et enhetlig verk. Det er Bibelens motivkrets med fremblikk mot Messias komme/respektive Kristi gjenkomst som er overført til norrøn diktning. Sibylle-diktningen danner mellomleddet mellom Voluspå H, Hyndluljod, Bibelen og dens apokryfer og apokalypser. Det kompliserte Hyndluljod har til overmål to fremtidsskikkelser, den først er Forløperen som er næret på ekstraordinær kost a la Døperen Johannes. Den andre er Kristus selv som skal råde over den nye tidsalder. Hyndluljod og Voluspå er lagt i munnen på henholdsvis volve og gygre, to forkledninger av sibyllen. Temaet har jeg publisert under tittelen «Myten om fremtiden og den nordiske sibylle», 2006. Mitt syn på sibyllenes mellomværende og påvirkning på Voluspå er av studier i jødiske apokryfer etter John J. Collins forskning, en inspirator på feltet.

Et vendepunkt i sibylle-debatten kom fra Ursula Dronke. I eddakommentaren fra 1997 pekte hun på flere mulige veier mellom den klassiske sibylle-diktningen og Voluspå. Hun fant at sibylle-orakler var inkorporert i engelske liturgier mellom 800–1000-tallet. Hun åpnet for at norrøne mennesker kan ha stiftet bekjentskap med sibyllene i England over et stort tidsspenn. Hun viste til mulige kommunikasjonskanaler via Spania, Irland, England. For ikke å snakke om hvor viktig det har vært at Anke Holdenried etter mange års forskning publiserte sine resultater i boken «The Sibyl and her Scribes» (2006), som tilsier at sibyllenes orakler florerte i lærde kretser over hele Europa i årene 1050–1500. Mens flere hevdet at skriftene primært hadde politisk betydning, viser Holderied at den religiøse betydningen har vært like viktig. Det hører med til saken at Michelanglo malte fem sibyller og syv profeter i taket på det sixtinske kapell på 1500-tallet.

Til spørsmålet om en mulig *Visual Tradition*

Anton Christian Bangs sibyller lar seg ikke lenger holde tilbake. Sammen med Samplonius, Johansson og Pétursson befinner jeg meg i gruppen av forskere som regner Voluspå som et dikt som reflekterer en kristen kontekst med utspring i kloster eller kirke. Det får selvsagt betydning for synet på datering. Etter mitt syn kan ikke Voluspå – som vi kjenner diktet – ha en århundrelang muntlig fortid. Dertil er diktet altfor lærd, fortettet lærd med sin briljante typologi og skjulte bibelske lek. Voluspå som vi kjenner diktet, må være skapt i en tid der kristendommen har vunnet feste i norrøn kultur. Et verk som med autoritet a la sibyllinsk *vaticinium ex eventu* har valgt Kristus som den nye tids herre og mester.

Med dette er jeg klar for å kommentere spørsmålet om en mulig visuell inspirasjon for Voluspå. Her faller jo Hólar-katedralen nord på Island på plass. Utfra reminisenser av et ikonografisk program, trolig fra katedralens vestfront, med hovedtema Dommedag, dateres kirken til tidlig 1100-tall. Da står vi overfor den mulighet at kirken med kirkebakken danner en perfekt scene for *performance* av Voluspå. Kirkebakkene har vært menighetens offentlige møteplass helt opp mot vår egen tid. Hólar-katedralen kan ha vært sted for fremførelse av Voluspå, en bro fra hedendom til kristendom.

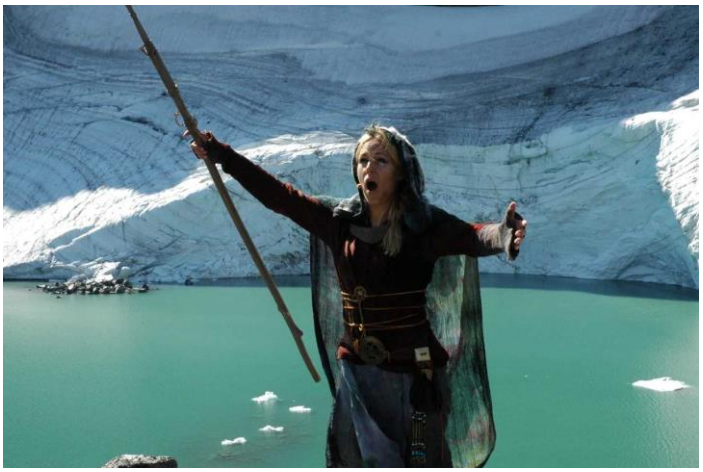
Denne tolkningen av Voluspå setter store krav til dikteren: høyt utdannet, skrivekyndig, kunstnerisk begavet, munk eller klerk i en hovedkirkes tjeneste. Kunstneren sitter inne med kjennskap til hele den før-kristne mytologien, den antikke gudeverden, sibylle-tradisjonen. Han har solide bibelkunnskaper og kjenner til mangfoldet av religions- og kjetterdannelser rundt den tidlige kristendommen. Kanskje har han hatt kontakt med irske eller andre mellomledd til Østkirken, der *imago dei*-motivet ble hold høyt i hevd. Dikteren må være av nordisk opprinnelse ettersom han har valgt å tegne frembruddet av den nye jord i nordiske naturbilder. Katedralen og diktet med de flerfoldige impulsene kan ha krysset klinge på en kirkebakke på Island i tidlig middelalder.

Voluspå som *performance* i Jotunheimens 2013

Og nå, Terry, et eksempel på at din vedvarende utfordring om diktverket som *performance* har vært utprøvd i elleville kulisser her til lands. Du skulle vært i høyfjellet, ved Juvassbreen i Jotunheimen, 2000 meter over havet, august 2013. Da steg en skinnkledd volve utstyrt med en mektig volvestav opp av den bratte uren ved brekanten. I et øyeblikks hellig stillhet møtte hun blikkene fra et moderne publikum kledd i vindtett goretex. Så hevet hun staven over hodet og lot en fulltonende mezzosopran runge utover is og bre og høyfjell: «Hør meg!» - skapelse, undergang, peripeti, fremtid til følge av overjordiske toner.

Voluspå til nylaget musikk fra komponisten Ragnar Søderlind (min ektefelle). Det entusiastiske publikum hadde vandret siste stykket til fots på stier tilrettelagt av fjellvante tibetanere. Det er vanskelig å beskrive opplevelsen. Eksperimentet var ellevilt, seansen kunne vært sabotert av snøstorm, kulde, kuling, så høyt til fjells blir det fort

ulevelig. I stedet viste værgudene seg fra beste side, glitrende solskinn, skyfritt himmelrom og hvitgrønne bremasser. Helt utenfor regi «kalvet» Juvassbreen med bulder og brak midt under forestillingen.



Voluspå fremført ved Juvvassbreen, Jotunheimen, 2012. Volven: Operasanger Ingeborg Gilllebo, Den norske Opera. Musikk: Komponist Ragnar Søderlind. Tekst: Voluspå i oversettelse ved Preben Meulengracht Sørensen og Gro Steinsland, Pax 1999. Foto: Elin Stokkenes, Innlandet Fylkeskommune.

Voluspå i Jotunheimen ble til gjennom et samarbeid med fjellarkeologene på Lillehammer som har høyfjellet som forskningsarena. De seneste årene er det gjort oppsiktsvekkende funn av urgamle vandre- og jaktruter, fangstgraver, forhistorisk gjenstandsmateriale, klesplagg, sko, jaktredskaper. Samtidig ble Klimapark Mimesbrønnen 2469 i Jotunheimen åpnet, hugget ut i 6000 år gammel is. Hulens innside er formet som det sirkulære norrøne verdensbildet med Midgardsormen buktende i is. Stedet er naturvitenskapelig målestasjon av isens urovekkende smelting år for år. Om få

år vil Mimesbrønnen være smeltet bort. Foreløpig innbyr hulen til forskning og undervisning.

Det ble en annerledes opplevelse å introdusere Voluspå i brekanten på Norges tak. Mens ord, toner og gester bar budskapet ut over fjellet, lurte jeg på om dette var en *performance* Terry kunne anerkjent. For oss som var til stede, var det opplagt at volve-sibyllens budskap traff hjerter og hjerner hos et moderne publikum. Men det hele var et ellevilt vågestykke. Ennå har ingen våget å sette opp *hele* diktverket 2000 moh. Next time, Terry!

PS. Et par ord om livets egne tilskikkelser som kan være forunderlige. Da jeg for mange år siden lyktes med å skaffe skrivestue på Hadeland, kom Anton Christian Bang vandrende ut av historien, nærmest som en gammel nabo. For på enkesetet Sjo, nabo til Søsterkirkene på Granavollen, bodde han som sognepresten. Bang ble etterhvert en betydelig skikkelse i samtiden, professor i teolog og kirkehistorie, biskop i Christiania, endog kirke- og undervisningsminister. Han hadde en stor, lærd produksjon og skrev en selvopptatt selvbiografi. En av hans næreste venner i Sjo-tiden var dikteren Aasmund Olavsson Vinje, to ulike sjeler, men bestevenner. På dødsleiet skrev Vinje seg ut av Rikshospitalet for å dra til sin venn på Sjo der han døde i loftskammeret neste dag. Vinje er begravet ved Nicolaykirken på Granavollen og minnes årlig med kransenedleggelse og diktopplesning. Jeg tenker at jeg må ta mer ansvar for at også Bang, Voluspå og sibyllene minnes på stedet.

DE NATURA DEORUM: FEW THESES ON GODS AND PANTHEONS

Jan A. Kozák*

Among Terry Gunnell's extensive works is the exploration of the nature of the Old Norse pantheon, the real-life relationships individuals or various tribal or local societies had with their gods, and the diachronic change in these relationships (Gunnell 2007; 2013; 2015). The debate revolves around fascinating and important questions like: Was there really a pantheon? Or were there rather tribal gods (possibly tribal monolatry or henotheism) who were only later organised into a pantheon by Snorri? To me at least, however, this debate begins mid-page: How can we address these questions before understanding how the Norse gods functioned, what was their specific nature? Comparative studies of other cultures (Greek, Indian, Mesopotamian) reveal that polytheistic societies can structure their pantheons in diverse ways. This diversity is closely tied to the culturally specific characteristics of the deities, deriving from the *natura deorum*, the nature of the gods.

This comparison reveals not only diversity, but also the fact that certain images seem to appear again and again among various polytheistic societies – for example both from Mesopotamia (Antalík 2004, 21) and from Greece (Burkert 2011, 333) we have the image of the 'council of the gods,' similar to what we find e.g. in the first refrain in *Vǫluspá*: *þá gengu regin ǫll á rǫkstóla, ginnheilǫg goð ok um það gættuz* (Dronke 1997, 9, 117). The Council of the Gods is a place where the community of gods discusses issues and reaches a collective decision. In this article I would like to add a few comments on the topic of the pantheon and its development and also discuss the nature of the gods themselves. The following text will be a conscious venture into the area of philosophy and speculation as I believe that this unconventional genre can add variety to the present anthology and entertain our beloved celebrant.

I would start with what Terry Gunnell rightly criticises (Gunnell 2015, 56): the image of the religious and mythological landscape as it is presented in Snorra Edda. Snorri not

* Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague.

only pushes his pantheon agenda, but also does one thing which has such a strong effect on our image and understanding of Old Norse mythology: he concretises the gods and their acts and changes them into surrealistic fictional narratives. His Edda is prosaic not only literally, but also metaphorically. At the same time he is writing a 'textbook' so he has to be even more prosaic and didactic about it. The result of his endeavour is really a literary cosmos with superheroes. Which might not have been that close to the experience 'on the ground' as it were, for the practitioners of the tradition.

Snorri's literalist approach generates exactly all these fruitless questions like 'who is Óðinn's *real* consort? Frigg or Freyja?,' or 'so is Mímir at his well decapitated or not?,' 'how many magical wells are there exactly at the tree?' etc. Questions about the coherence of the cosmos as if it were a literary world like the one of Game of Thrones and we are looking for inconsistencies in the author's worldbuilding. In reality it is possible that the stories and the deities could have been much more *calleidoscopic*, which is a phenomenon known from many other traditions: Variants of the 'same' story and 'same' deity existing in hundreds of versions with the practitioners constantly performing judgements about the identity of this or that deity (various cases of *interpretatio localis*). From India we know well the process of Hinduisation (or Sanskritisation; Doniger 2009) where the local or tribal deities are 'sucked in' the global Hindu mythology by being identified as an *avatāra* of one of the great gods. We should expect a similar process being performed by the global elites of the Viking age on the local traditions.

We should therefore not find it strange that Heimdallr is identified with Rígr, while Rígr in turn seems to be quite 'odinic' in his nature, so maybe under certain conditions these three deities can be interchangeable. Or that Týr in *Hymiskviða* seems to behave like Loki – being a clever sidekick to Þórr with a monstrous pedigree. Or that Frigg and Freyja or even Sága seem to be Óðinn's *paredros*, his divine consort. Or that there is a clear analogy between the myth of the kidnapping of Iðunn and Óðinn's quest for the mead of poetry. Are they the same myth under different guises or not? Is Heimdallr, Rígr and Óðinn the same god? These are wrong questions, because they presuppose a concept of some kind of universal 'sameness,' some kind of objective literary Otherworld, but this has no place in the Old Norse culture. These stories and gods are similar and can be even temporarily identified in particular moments or constellations, but we should not talk about 'sameness' and we should not try to 'tidy up' the cosmology and mythology. It is a hall of mirrors and its various tantalising almost-similarities are not 'bugs' to be dealt with but characterising features. They constantly remind us that this cosmology is being born out of manifold parallel traditions that are bound together by a series of perceived similarities and identifications of the sort of *interpretatio romana*, but on an intra-cultural local level.

To be fair to Snorri, some aspect of a concretising tendency is present already in the epic poems of the Poetic Edda. Personification and even burlesque humanisation of the gods is something that is not typical of Old Norse mythology only. We find very similar dispositions already in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, texts that cannot be accused of being under Christian or learned influence. We should therefore treat personification

separately from 'systemisation.' Homeric gods are depicted in a very concrete way with gusto – for example when Athena brawls with Ares or Hera with Artemis in the *Iliad* (book XXI, verses 394–495). However, to assess this style of depiction we need to take into account the nature of the genre of epics and various registers and perspectives that the Homeric epic uses. There are at least two different perspectives in use (cf. Chlup 2004, 35–36): when the poet describes gods directly in their interaction, he does not shy away from very humanising imagery. It is clear that the poet resorts to this by design, to be colourful and to elicit emotions. Because there is also a secondary register, a way to describe gods in a much more vague and mysterious way, which Homer does whenever he lets his heroes speak for themselves, whenever he describes the situation from their perspective. The human heroes usually just notice there has been some kind of influence from the divine sphere, but are not sure of its exact nature (Ehnmark 1935, 64). If Homer kept only to this second register, which might be closer to how gods were experienced 'on the ground' by the real practitioners, the divine actions would remain blurry and intransparent, in the end potentially not understandable.

By switching to concrete anthropomorphisation the poet can make the acts of the gods understandable by using imagery from the human sphere. However, in the end, it is just a poetic convention, not a literal description of the 'realm of the gods.' We may try to contrast the epic literal representation of a deity with the full scope of their 'operation.' Gods in this wider sense were not just 'characters' but rather meta-patterns connecting and binding together various disparate dimensions of life, as summarised for Zeus by Chlup (forthcoming; cf. also Chlup 2018, 105):

> The Greek god Zeus, for example, embodies the leadership principle associated with oversight and a sense of the whole, and is the patron of world order as such. On a cosmic level, this is manifested by him being the ruler of the sky and clouds, his typical abode being mountain peaks, and his bird being the eagle, the king of birds. On a social level, Zeus demonstrates his perspective by acting as Panhellenic: he is not the patron of any single community but oversees all Greek communities and the municipal political arrangement as a whole. Zeus is the patron of fundamental political institutions: he oversees the activities of city councils, which were akin to our parliaments, and is the patron of squares where citizens could meet and debate. Zeus is the god of law, a judge who fairly assesses the claims of all parties. From this title, he also oversees the independence of all human judges and embodies the qualities and abilities that every good human ruler and judge must possess. Through all this, Zeus connects various spheres, metaphorically imprinting them with the same character, thus contributing to the creation of a sense of meaningful interconnectedness in different areas of human experience. Thanks to him, the world appears as a place where the values of oversight and just governance of the whole are cosmically anchored and can be relied upon in many areas.

It is easier to show those other faces of the deity (even in literature alone) in the context of Greek religion as we have more genres pertaining to religion and mythology extant. For example, Ancient Greek culture, and many other ancient cultures, had a genre of hymns, a praise poems to the gods. In this genre the gods were much more solemn and even mysterious. We can ask ourselves if this genre existed in the pre-Christian North. If it did, it would have been too close to the cult and would certainly not have been

recorded and transmitted by the Christian scribes. Was the fragment of *Heimdallargaldr* cited by Snorri such a hymn perhaps? Or could we categorise *Þórsdrápa* as the only surviving hymn?

We can understand the face-punching, curse-spewing superhero as just one of the typical facets of a deity, their representation within the genre of mythological poetry while there are other facets and we can try to 'squint our eyes' and see the meta-pattern connecting the various representations. However, this meta-pattern feels rather abstract and etic, not something that could be explicated by those who directly lived the tradition. How could we imagine the deity from their perspective?

Here we are dangerously close to the 'if I were a horse' area. I will therefore, rather than directly sketching the perspective of the Viking age farmer, offer an imaginative analogy based on the folklore surrounding the supernatural entity called *Vodník* (Wassermann, Hastrman, Nix) from eighteenth- to nineteenth-century Czechia. This analogy aims not at proving anything, it is just a way to open up our imagination regarding the nature of these entities.

Let's transport ourselves to a remote village in early modern Central Europe. What is a *Vodník* here? A *Vodník* is when, now and then, without a doubt maliciously, the mill wheel gets stuck, precisely when there's the most work to be done. A *Vodník* is when, years ago, the neighbour's daughter tragically drowned in the mill race. A *Vodník* is when, in the spring, it seems as if hidden mirrors are glinting on the other side of the pond behind the mill. A *Vodník* is when, occasionally, circles form on the pond's surface during a complete calm, or when footsteps are heard in the mill's attic at night, which make the dog bark tirelessly. A *Vodník* is also the one who features in many stories told in the village, and is also present in the cautious avoidance of the word '*Vodník*' within earshot of the mill. And, last but not least, a *Vodník* is someone to whom small sacrifices of tobacco are made by the fishermen for success at fishing. Although a *Vodník* does not exist in the positivist-materialist sense, it is a valid 'member of society,' an important figure in the village. It cannot simply be dismissed as a mistake. A *Vodník* is not the creation of learned speculation, a theoretical concept of 'primitive' villagers, to be compared with (currently) more successful and modern science and disproved. A *Vodník* is the living and functional result of collective experience, formed like a pebble in a riverbed, smoothed over time and the influence of the elements into a specific natural shape (Kozák 2021, 70).

Vodník, as well as any other supernatural entity, has this strange nature of *being formed by collective experience*, but also at the same time not having any tangible positivistic core. It is known as 'collective representation.' But this classic Durkheimian term suggests something far less organic and wild (e.g the state flag etc.) than entities like *Vodník*, or restless dead, or Virgin Mary, or Þórr. Deities and 'supernatural' beings are not products of speculation, but products of long-term collective experience. We would not be able to recognize *Vodník* by just passing by. A visiting scientist with their measurement devices would not see the unity behind the various separate phenomena: the bubbles on the water are just a chemical process in the mud, the drowning was an unfortunate accident etc. Only those who have lived there for a long time can 'sense' the character of the place,

genius loci, with its peculiarities. Here we confront the limitations of our scientific method: it aims to explain by division into elements. But what if an entity like a god is an emergent phenomenon? We will not find it by analysis of constituent parts.

In mathematics there is a concept called 'strange attractor.' It describes an emergent pattern stabilising around a certain position but without direct relation to that position. We can use weather as an example of this principle: While we cannot predict the exact weather weeks from now, we know it follows certain patterns over seasons and years. The atmosphere's behaviour could be thought of as following a strange attractor. It is chaotic and complex, but there is an underlying structure that we can recognise over long periods.

If deities are like strange attractors, emergent entities, they are in the end not that different from ourselves:

> A Self is precisely an entity without any substantial density, without any hard kernel that would guarantee its consistency. If we penetrate the surface of the organism, and look deeper and deeper into it, we never encounter some central controlling element that would be its Self, secretly pulling the strings of its organs. The consistency of the Self is thus purely virtual; it is as if it were an Inside which appears only when viewed from the Outside, on the interface-screen – the moment we penetrate the interface and endeavor to grasp the Self 'substantially,' as it is 'in itself,' it disappears like sand between our fingers. […] The Self is not the 'inner kernel' of an organism, but a surface-effect. (Žižek 2006, 206)

To think about deities as these types of emergent patterns means to leave the simplified image of a literary character behind. These 'patterns' are represented in various ways in narratives, in ritual, in dramas, in everyday sayings etc, but these representations make sense as elements of a whole, similarly to a word making sense only when we have internalised the *langue*, the grammatical system, of which it is a part.

The representation of the 'deity pattern' is in principle guided by metaphors. Metaphors (and other tropes) play a key role in our ability to speak about invisible, dispersed, complex or abstract things (Kövecses 2002, 6). In the case of deities the types of metaphors used correspond to various '-morphisms:' anthropomorphism, sociomorphism (society of gods and its functioning), theriomorphism, dendro-morphism, physiomorphism etc.

We can for example take Heimdallr, who is in various contexts represented as a humanoid entity, riding a horse, talking (anthropomorphism); as guardian of the gods, standing outside the hall (sociomorphism); many of his *heiti* point to a ram representation (theriomorphism); according e.g. to Ursula Dronke, he is in some contexts identified with the World Tree (Dronke 1997, 107; dendromorphism); he has been born by nine waves of the ocean (physiomorphism). These are all various metaphors used to capture something elusive and difficult to describe a pattern experienced in the cosmos and society, a series of perceived similarities and associations that produce an impression of a 'character.'

Our perspective on Old Norse deities is skewed towards their epic literary facet, while most of what their everyday lived facets or cultic facets were is lost to us. The

concepts suggested above offer a perspective that frees us from the default understanding of gods as literary characters with cults. But does it help in any way when discussing pantheons or the evident plurality of traditions?

The answer lies in the very principle of how the deity is constituted – it is a product of specific experiential synthesis. Various elements of society and cosmos are synthesised ('found' to belong to the sphere of the same numinous power). The same mechanism of synthesis creates the identification across tribes and valleys and societies: the various local Freyrs (or Ba'als or Apollos) are identified with similar deities – sometimes the identified deities have the same name, because they are genetically related, sometimes they don't even have the same name, but then the local name becomes just an epithet or alternative name – we can suppose that Yng(vi) and Freyr were once two different local deities. This synthetic *interpretatio* is something clearly pre-Christian, as it is attested from many other older cultures (*interpretatio romana*, *graeca* etc.).

When it comes to the question of a pantheon, we have to return to the fact mentioned at the beginning of the text that *natura deorum scandiæ* has both some transcultural and some culturally specific elements. The uniqueness of the Norse deities as compared to numinous agents in other cultural areas is a fascinating topic that deserves a separate study and cannot be explored here, not least because we would have to be quite specific about time period, area and social stratum – there are no universal and constant *dei scandiæ*. Among the many specificities to be explored are for example the repeated metaphor of gods as *bǫnd* or *hǫpt* (the role of bonds and shackles in the cosmology), the relationship of the worshippers to their gods (not articulated through the metaphor of servitude, like e.g. in Mesopotamia, but rather friendship), or the eventual mortality of the gods. Interesting is also the fact that at least in the extant mythological corpus the gods perform Otherworld journeys of the type associated in other cultures rather with mortal heroes – but we could see this as a first stage of the process of euhemerisation when gods are slowly being turned into mere heroes.

The issue of the pantheon is however bound closely not to something specific and unique, but rather to something quite common in the history of religions: In early Mesopotamia, each city-state had its own patron god or goddess, such as Inanna in Uruk and Enlil in Nippur. As political power shifted and city-states merged or came under centralised control, these deities were integrated into a broader pantheon (Bottéro 2000, 38). The Greek pantheon evolved from the integration of various local and tribal deities as Greek culture became more unified. The Olympian gods, such as Zeus, Hera, and Poseidon, represented a syncretic assembly of gods from different regions and city-states (Burkert 2011, 331). The Egyptian pantheon is another example where local deities were integrated into a larger religious framework. Each region or city had its own patron deities, such as Amun in Thebes and Ptah in Memphis. Over time, these gods were integrated into a cohesive pantheon (Hornung 1982, 217nn; Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2005, 13, 30–32). The development of Hinduism involved the syncretism of various local and tribal deities into a complex and hierarchical pantheon. Deities such as Śiva, Viṣnu, and Devī absorbed local gods and traditions in the process called "hinduization"

(Viswanathan 2003, 25). This process is rather the rule so we may expect the same when it comes to the pre-Christian Scandinavian society and the burden of proof is on those who think that the Norse would be different. Organised pantheon is a product of a more integrated society, another step in the same synthesising process which is the motor behind the constitution of the deities themselves and in the mutual identification of those local gods that seem similar to each other.

To sum up, let us overview the key concepts and theses in this article:

1. Deities and pantheons can be interpreted as products of a special kind of synthetic process based firstly on experience and secondly on recognising similarities. This mode is starkly contrasted to the analytical mode typical of science and scholarship. Myth is usually understood as the opposite of science, yet we try to understand myth and religion by exactly this framework that is most alien to it, which must naturally lead to many misunderstandings and misconceptions.
2. Gods are constituted by collective experience, not rationalistic speculation, and are here interpreted as emergent entities integrating various dimensions (social, cosmic, intra-psychic etc.) together. They can be thought of as *strange attractors*, temporarily stable patterns around a non-concrete centre.
3. Gods should not be identified with their narrative or epic anthropomorphic representations (similarly we should not identify the company Michelin with the figure of Michelin Man or the company Disney with Mickey Mouse). These representations behave according to the semiotic code of the genre in which they are set. Our image of the Norse gods is skewed by the fact that we get most of our information from mythological or epic narratives. We are missing many genres like hymns, prayers and data related to ritual and custom which would allow us to see the deities more as 'powers' (*regin*) and less as 'superheroes.' The portrayal of the gods as emotional and flawed humans is not an issue by itself, it is something attested regularly in the genre of mythological epics in other cultures, but by identifying gods with their epic representations we tacitly accept the straw-man argument of Christian and learned critique of anthropomorphic polytheistic gods.
4. The synthetic kind of thinking and experiencing which is the precondition for the existence (or discernment) of deities works along different lines than our everyday logic of the excluded third. It is based on similarity, analogy and metaphor and not on sameness, identity and exclusion. It is in natural tune in the fact that societies produce endless parallel traditions and myths, and do not require any agreement on canon or a final, binding version. For us scholars it is very difficult to think of this plurality, as we feel the need to agree on one version ('truth') and exclude all the others.

I am well aware that as secular scholars we can never discuss what is the 'real' nature of the gods, as we have to put the ontological status of supernatural beings in brackets.

Nevertheless, what we can do is to map as closely as possible what is given: how the deity manifests itself in recorded encounters (hierophanies), in literature, in mythology, in cult, in everyday language, in metaphors etc. I claim it is important to have some kind of theory about the nature and ways of manifestation of the gods in culture, otherwise we may end up in some naivist model where the gods are seen as mere fictional characters (like the marvel superheroes) who – for some strange reason – happen to have a cult and people believe in their reality. We end up then with a kind of patronising inner stance where we tacitly assume that this has to be caused by the fact that in the past or even in some contemporary societies people did not have access to proper education and therefore they misunderstood how nature and society really worked. And as this type of 'theory' is the tacit default of modern Western secular culture, we will end up implicitly following the default one, if we do not have some kind of theory of our own.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Dronke, Ursula, ed. and transl. 1997. The Poetic Edda: Volume II: Mythological Poems. Clarendon Press.

West, Martin L., ed. 1998–2000. Homer. *Iliad*. 2 vols. Oxford University Press.

Secondary Sources

Antalík, Dalibor. 2004. "Pojetí božství v předhelénské Mezopotámii" [The conception of the divine in pre-Hellenic Mesopotamia]. In *Bůh a bohové* [God and the gods], edited by Radek Chlup, 9–30. DharmaGaia.

Bottéro, Jean. 2000. "Religion and Reasoning in Mesopotamia." In *Ancestor of the West: Writing, Reasoning, and Religion in Mesopotamia, Elam, and Greece*, edited by Jean Bottéro, Clarisse Herrenschmidt, and Jean-Pierre Vernant, translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan, 3–65. University of Chicago Press.

Burkert, Walter. 2011. *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*. 2nd ed. Kohlhammer.

Chlup, Radek. 2004. "Pojetí božství v Řecku" [The conception of the divine in Greece]. In *Bůh a bohové*, edited by Radek Chlup, 31–57. DharmaGaia.

———. 2018. "On the Nature of the Gods: Methodological Suggestions for the Study of Greek Divinities." *History of Religions* 58, no. 2: 101–27.

———. (forthcoming). *Úvod do religionistiky* [Introduction to religious studies].

Doniger, Wendy. 2009. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. Penguin.

Dunand, Françoise, and Christiane Zivie-Coche. 2005. *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE.* Cornell University Press.

Ehnmark, Erland. 1935. *The Idea of God in Homer*. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Gunnell, Terry. 2007. "How Elvish were the Álfar?" In *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T. A. Shippey*, edited by Andrew Wawn, Graham Johnson, and John Walter, 111–30. Brepols.

———. 2013. "From One High-One to Another: The Acceptance of Óðinn as Preparation for the Acceptance of God." In *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Leszek Słupecki and Rudolf Simek. Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia 23, 153–78. Fassbaender.

———. 2015. "Pantheon? What Pantheon? Concepts of a Family of Gods in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions." *Scripta Islandica* 66: 55–76.

Hornung, Erik. 1982. *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many.* Cornell University Press.

Kövescses, Zoltan. 2002. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Kozák, Jan A. 2021. *Monomýtus: syntetické pojednání o teorii mýtu* [Monomyth: A Synthetic Treatise on the Theory of Myth]. Malvern.

Viswanathan, Gauri. 2003. "Colonialism and the Construction of Hinduism." In *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, edited by Gavin Flood, 23–44. Blackwell.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2006. *Parallax View*. MIT Press.

HVERS KONAR HEIMILD ER EDDA?

Gísli Sigurðsson*

Þegar við hugsum um Snorra Eddu sem heimild um forkristnar trúarhugmyndir í Norðurálfu hefur það verið algeng sýn í fræðunum á síðari öldum að Snorri hafi verið lærður fræðimaður að vinna úr munnlegum og jafnvel skriflegum heimildum, einkum í bundnu máli, þegar hann setti saman og lét skrifa þá kennslubók handa ungum skáldum sem heitir Edda. Þessi síðari alda fræði hafa lagað Snorra að okkar hugmynd um fræðimanninn sem hafi verið að semja heildstætt yfirlitsrit um norræna heiðni úr þeim heimildabrotum sem honum voru tiltæk. Og í rauninni ekki haft mikið fyrir sér enda langt um liðið frá því að heiðni var aflögð og kristni tekin upp sem hin opinberu trúarbrögð – nema kannski hann hafi náð í skottið á einhverri forneskju á ferðalögum sínum meðal Svía sem hafi verið fornir í skapi og lengur handgengnir æsum, vönum og jötnum en sannkristnir landar Snorra á Rangárvöllum eða í Borgarfirði. Til þess að geta metið „heimildargildi“ Eddu á þessum forsendum verður þá eðlilega mikilvægt að geta gert sér grein fyrir aldri „heimildanna“, þ.e. hvort kvæðin sem Snorri hafi „notað“ hafi virkilega verið „ort“ áður en kristni barst í norðurálfu, og að hve miklu leyti hugmyndir Snorra hafi verið mótaðar af menntun og lærdómi samtíma hans í bland við eigið hugarflug og nýsköpun þegar kom að því að draga upp þá heildarmynd sem Gylfaginning Eddu dregur upp af heiminum. Áður en við vitum af erum við þá farin að hugsa um eldri og upprunalegri hugmyndir um goðafræðina andspænis seinni tíma tilbúningi Snorra sjálfs sem hafi oft ekki skilið þær „heimildir“ sem hann hafði. Jafnvel búið eitthvað til sem við getum leiðrétt. Og svo framvegis eftir kunnuglegum umræðubrautum í fræðunum (Faulkes 1982; Lindow 2002, 18–26; Heimir Pálsson 2012; 2017).

Ef við stöldrum aðeins við þessa hugmynd um Snorra er vert að benda á að það er engin heimild fyrir því að Snorri hafi unnið með þessum hætti – fyrir nú utan alla klassísku fyrirvarana um hin fjögur ólíku miðaldahandrit verksins sem við köllum Snorra Eddu og hvað við eigum við með að Snorri hafi sett Edduna saman, og þá hvaða

* Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Háskóli Íslands.

texta, ef nokkurn, af þessum fjórum ólíku gerðum o.s.frv. Það sem meira er: Vettvangsrannsóknir þjóð- og mannfræðinga í bland við þau fræði sem hafa byggst upp í kringum minnisrannsóknir á efni sem miðlað er án ritunar í tengslum við hvers konar siði og venjur ættu einmitt að vekja okkur til umhugsunar um að gera tilraun með þann möguleika að skoða heimildina Eddu sem eina heild í þeim skilningi að hún sé heimild um heildstæða þekkingu og úrvinnslu þess sem setti bókina saman – rétt eins og við myndum gera ef einhver hefði skráð sams konar efni frá hátt settum heimildarmanni í samfélagi sem styddist ennþá að verulegu leyti við munnlega varðveislu sagna og kvæða þegar kæmi að minningum um fortíðina. Og við þá tilraun sakar ekki að hafa í huga að ef við gengjum fjórum sinnum fyrir þennan heimildarmann, eða ef fjórir safnarar færu hver á eftir öðrum til að safna efni hjá honum er hætt við að „textamunur" yrði töluverður (Gísli Sigurðsson 2018a). Þrátt fyrir alla ofangreinda fyrirvara er munur handrita Snorra Eddu ekki svo mikill að hann mæli gegn því að við hugsum um hana sem eitt samið sköpunarverk með eðlilegum textamun á milli handrita.

Helsti gallinn á þessari heimild sem heitir Edda er þó sá að við höfum bara skrifuðu orðin að vinna úr. Við höfum engar vettvangsnótur um ytri aðstæður og það umhverfi sem þeim orðum var miðlað í við „söfnunina" – hvað þá þegar heimildarmaðurinn var að miðla efni sínu án þess að nokkur ritari væri viðstaddur. Mikilvægi slíkra aukaupplýsinga til viðbótar við sjálf orðin sem skrifuð eru, verður einstaklega ljóst þegar reynt er að átta sig á því hvað er að gerast í texta Snorra Eddu í kringum sviðsetninguna á samtali Gylfa konungs við „konungana þrjá" Háan, Jafnháan og Þriðja; hvert þeir horfi og hvert þeir bendi eins og sýnt er á hinni þekktu mynd af þeim í Uppsala Eddu. Ginningin eða sjónhverfingin sem Gylfi verður fyrir felst í að því sem hann telur sig sjá með berum augum á himninum (s.s. það sem hann kallar regnboga vegna fákunnáttu sinnar um goðfræðileg efni) er umbreytt með göldrum frásagnarlistarinnar í alla þá goðaveröld sem Hár, Jafnhár og Þriðji lýsa fyrir Gylfa. Þegar sjónhverfingunni/ginningunni lýkur eftir sagnastund konunganna þriggja, er Gylfi aftur staddur á sléttum velli undir berum himni – rétt eins og við áhorfendur í leikhúsi þegar tjaldið fellur og ljósin eru kveikt að lokinni sýningu (Gísli Sigurðsson 2022).

Heimsmynd og goðsögur Gylfaginningar eru sett fram með þeirri vel þekktu minnistækni að tengja það sem á að læra við eitthvað sem er sýnilegt, hvort sem það er landslag með örnefnum, persónum og sögum sem tengja þetta allt saman með ættartengslum (eins og við þekkjum úr Landnámu og Íslendingasögunum), eða bygging (sýnileg eða ímynduð), þar sem hugurinn getur komið ólíkum sögum og minnisatriðum fyrir, til dæmis í sætum, herbergjum eða hirslum (Hermann 2022, 84–91). Í Gylfaginningu er því sem verið er að segja frá komið fyrir með sambærilegum hætti „á himni", í ólíkum *sölum*, sem sólin á, og *stöðum* sem stjörnurnar eiga, eins og segir í Völuspá. Gallinn fyrir okkur lesendur bókarinnar er sá að við vitum ekkert hvert kennarinn í hlutverki hins goðmagnaða þríeykis er að benda þegar hann beinir sjónum lærlingsins Gylfa að þessum stöðum og sölum „á himni." Nema hvað við þekkjum regnbogann sem Gylfaginning breytir í brú guðanna milli himins og jarðar fyrir augum okkar. Við getum að auki verið nokkuð viss um að það eru ekki mörg fyrirbæri á himni

sem hægt er að benda á sem hinn hvíta og hálfgegnsæja ask – sem teygir limar sínar og þrjár rætur um himininn og niður fyrir sjóndeildarhringinn – önnur en hin hvíta og hálfgegnsæja vetrarbraut sem teygir sig eins og hvítur trjástofn upp úr undirdjúpunum úr tveimur áttum og upp á himininn þar sem sýnilegur angi teygir sig líka út úr henni (Gísli Sigurðsson 2018b).

Við túlkun og úrvinnslu á efni sem safnast í vettvangsferðum á okkar dögum myndi engum detta annað í hug en að trúa og treysta því sem heimildarmaðurinn hefði fram að færa. Öll hans frásögn væri rétt um þær hugmyndir sem hann vildi miðla. Þess vegna er það svo mikilvægt að þjálfa fólk í vettvangsrannsóknum til að hafa eins lítil áhrif og mögulegt er á heimildarmanninn; spyrja sem minnst nema að biðja hann/hana um að segja meira frá, og alls ekki móta nálgunina, áherslur eða viðhorf til hins safnaða efnis á nokkurn hátt, hvað þá andmæla eða reyna að „leiðrétta“ heimildarmanninn í ljósi upplýsinga frá einhverjum öðrum. Að sjálfsögðu er það bara óskhyggja að þetta sé í raun og veru hægt því að með því einu að leita upplýsinga hjá viðmælanda er búið að hafa áhrif á allar aðstæður – rétt eins og menn vita í eðlisfræðinni: um leið og eitthvað er mælt hefur mælingin áhrif á hið mælda.

Þegar mann- og þjóðfræðingar hafa safnað saman efni eftir bestu getu er það verkefni þeirra að túlka það í því ljósi að viðmælandinn sé áreiðanleg heimild um hugmyndir sínar. Sem þarf ekki að þýða að hann/hún sé líka áreiðanleg heimild um hugmyndir misaldra samtímamanna sinna, hvað þá um hugmyndir formæðra sinna og -feðra. Nútímafræðimaðurinn leggur síðan áherslu á það í sinni túlkun að skilja hlutverk og merkingu þess sem hann/hún hefur séð og reynt í hinu lifandi menningarlega samhengi. Það yrði einkennlegt við þessar aðstæður að byrja strax að rýna í hugmyndir núlifandi heimildarmanns með það í huga að greina þær eftir því hvað þær gætu átt sér djúpar rætur í fortíðinni eða verið á einhvern hátt „rangar.“ Hugmyndir fólks um sína eigin hefð, siði og venjur, eru aldrei „rangar“ eða „brotakenndar“ þó að þær séu ólíkar hugmyndum einhverra annarra. Og þær eru alltaf mótaðar og settar fram miðað við þær aðstæður, þekkingu, lærdóm, hugmyndir og viðhorf sem þekkjast í samfélaginu á hverjum tíma — útfrá þeim einstaklingi sem talað er við, og taka þá eðlilega mið af aldri, búsetu, kyni, menntun, trú, stétt og stöðu og öllu öðru sem getur mótað hvern mann (Gilman og Fenn 2019).

Eins sjálfsagt og þetta þykir í vettvangsrannsóknum í samtímanum þá hefur gengið illa að yfirfæra þessar hugmyndir á þau fræði sem Snorri setti saman í Eddu. Ef við höldum hinum nútímalegu vettvangsgleraugum á nefinu þegar við snúum okkur að Snorra Eddu blasir nefnilega við allt annars konar verk en ef við héldum áfram að líta svo á að Snorri hafi verið fræðimaður í nútímaskilningi að vinna samfellda ritaða frásögn um goð- og skáldskaparfræðileg efni upp úr brotakenndum „heimildum.“ Með þessum nýju gleraugum sjáum við að Snorra Edda er hin eiginlega heimild; og meira að segja ótrúlega rækileg heimild úr innsta hring þeirra lærdómsmanna sem iðkuðu skáldskaparlist á æðsta menningarstigi á fyrri hluta þrettándu aldar og náðu að miðla þekkingu og skilningi á þeirri list til næstu kynslóðar, þ.e. kynslóðar þeirra Ólafs og Sturlu Þórðarsonar (bróðursona Snorra sem voru hjá honum í jólaveislunni frægu sandveturinn 1226 þegar gaus miklu öskugosi við Reykjanestá — og gætu við það

tækifæri hafa fengið að fara í heita pottinn með stóra frænda sínum að hlusta á sögur um hvað mætti sjá „á himni“ úr pottinum). Þeir Ólafur og Sturla héldu áfram að eiga góða daga sem hirðskáld í nokkra áratugi við norrænar hirðir eftir að Snorri hafði verið hogginn í kjallaranum heima hjá sér í Reykholti árið 1241. Það eru einmitt lærdómsmenn af þessu tagi sem mann- og þjóðfræðingar fá aldrei til að tala við sig um lærdóm sinn af því að sá lærdómur er iðulega hluti af einhvers konar leynireglu sem þeir hafa verið vígðir inn í með þar til gerðum vígsluathöfnum að loknum rækilegum undirbúningi (Hamacher 2022, 1–7).

Í Eddu leggur Snorri hins vegar öll spilin á borðið – spil sem mann- og þjóðfræðingarnir fá aldrei að sjá í sínum vettvagnsrannsóknum. Ástæðan fyrir því hvað Snorri er opinskár gæti verið sú að hann hafi aldrei gert ráð fyrir að bókin yrði til nema í nokkrum handskrifuðum eintökum í höndum reglubræðra hans í hirðskálda-hópnum. Hann var sannarlega ekki að bjarga neinni hverfandi hefð frá glötun með því að skrifa hana niður þó að það hafi síðan orðið raunin fyrir okkur. Miklu frekar má hugsa sér að Snorri hafi einlæglega verið að auðvelda ungskáldunum lærdóminn miðað við það sem áður tíðkaðist. Snorri hafði kynnst því á æskuárum sínum í Odda að kennslubækur gætu nýst vel í námi þeirra sem voru að undirbúa sig fyrir störf innan kirkjunnar. Engar heimildir eru um að slíkar bækur hafi tíðkast í þjálfun eða hefðbundnu skáldanámi verðandi dróttakvæðaskálda fram að því, námi sem við verðum að ætla að Snorri hafi stundað á unga aldri í bland við þjálfun sína í lögum. Það er hans skuldlausa hugmynd að láta sér detta í hug að bókarformið gæti líka komið að góðum notum við skáldanámið – þótt hann hafi væntanlega áfram hugsað sér, eins og Gylfaginning er vitnisburður um, að námið hlyti að verulegu leyti að fara fram undir björtum himni þar sem hægt væri að benda á öll þau fyrirbæri sem sögurnar snúast um. Námið hefur krafist slíkra kennsluaðstæðna. Í samanburði við slíkar aðstæður hefur verið takmarkað gagn að því að stauta sig fram úr smáu letri á lítilli skinnbók í quarto-broti við grútartýru inni í dimmum skála þar sem ekki var hægt að beina sjónum sínum til himins. Til að stunda kennslu í fræðum Eddu er miklu betra að koma sér upp heitum potti svo hægt sé að liggja úti næturlangt án þess að láta sér verða kalt þegar maður fylgist með bendingum kennarans til himins þar sem sjá má öll „tíðindin“ í Gylfaginningu.

Áður en við hefjum umræður um heimildagildi Eddu um þá heiðni sem iðkuð var í Norðurálfu á öldum áður verðum við að taka hana alvarlega sem áreiðanlega heimild um þau fræði sem ungskáld þurftu að tileinka sér á þrettándu öld, óháð öllum heiðnum trúarhugmyndum, eins og bókin segir reyndar sjálf:

> En þetta er nú at segja ungum skáldum þeim er girnask at nema mál skáldskapar ok heyja sér orðfjǫlda með fornum heitum eða girnask þeir at kunna skilja þat er hulit er kveðit: þá skili hann þessa bók til fróðleiks ok skemtunar. En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna svá þessar sǫgur at taka ór skáldskapinum for[nar ke]nningar þær er hǫfuðskáld hafa sér líka látit. En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin goð ok eigi á sannyndi þessar sagnar annan veg en svá sem hér finnsk í upphafi bókar er sagt er frá atburðum þeim er mannfólkit viltisk frá réttri trú…
> (Skáldskaparmál 5, sbr. Faulkes 1998)

Ef við samþykkjum þennan texta um að Edda endurspegli þann lærdóm sem ungu skáldin á dögum Snorra þurftu að standa skil á til að geta ort og skilið þau kvæði sem þau þurftu að flytja í hirðskáldastarfinu, er næsta spurning sú hvort sá lærdómur sé ekki að mörgu leyti svipaður þeim sem Snorri sjálfur þurfti að tileinka sér á ungum aldri í Odda. Og hvort aðferðin hafi ekki verið svipuð og í Eddu: Að benda lærlingnum til himins þar sem Gylfaginning segir okkur að finna megi þau fyrirbæri sem um er rætt – þó að við vitum ekki hvar. Varla dettur nokkrum manni í hug að Snorri hafi einn og sjálfur fengið þá hugmynd að tengja sögur af goðunum, bústöðum þeirra og sölum, við himininn. Slík tenging milli goðsagna og himinhvolfsins er reglan út um allan heim og því er í hæsta máta ólíklegt annað en að í þessu efni fylgi Snorri þeirri hefð sem hann ólst sjálfur upp við. Sömu sögu er að segja um að nota heiti norrænna goðmagna um reikistjörnurnar, auk sólar og mána: Týr um mars, Óðin um merkúr, Þór um júpíter og Freyju um venus. Því miður vitum við ekki hvaða goðmagn Snorri hefur tengt við satúrnus (Gísli Sigurðsson 2018b). Orð um svo áberandi fyrirbæri á himni eins og reikistjörnurnar sem hafa heillað mannkynið um alla jörð frá örófi alda (Selin 2000) með sínum hægu og dularfullu hreyfingum um „sali“ sólarinnar (eða „sólmörkin“) hljóta að hafa verið til á norrænu máli frá hinni löngu horfnu indóevrópsku fortíð þótt þau hafi ekki verið rituð fyrr en í tengslum við þá lærðu stjörnufræði sem barst um norðurálfu með bókmenningu kirkjunnar á tólftu og þrettándu öld.

Um leið og við prófum að nota nöfn goðanna í tengslum við hreyfingar reikistjarnanna á himni verður ljóst að þar eru sögur sífellt að gerast. Því miður vitum við ekki hvert á himninum Snorri benti lærlingum sínum úr heita pottinum í Reykholti, né þekkjum við hvaða heiti Snorri notaði um einstök stjörnu- og sólmörk utan hvað hið vaff-laga merki Hyades/Regnstirnið, er „þar sem við köllum úlfskjaft“ eins og segir í GKS 1812 4to. Úlfskjafturinn er rétt neðan við braut sólarinnar í maí- og júnímánuði. Þar með eiga tunglið og hinar sýnilegu reikistjörnur líka reglulega leið framhjá úlfskjaftinum (þau sem muna eftir goðsögum um Týr og Þór og úlfskjaft mega rétta upp hönd). Um svipað leyti og sólin gengur framhjá kjaftinum á ári hverju er dansað í kringum maístöngina í norðanverðri Evrópu. Gæti verið að sá hringdans tengist því að fólk vilji hjálpa sólinni að komast framhjá úlfinum – eða jafnvel fagna því að hún hafi enn einu sloppið við að láta hann gleypa sig?

Árið 2024 var hægt að fylgjast með goðsögu verða til sem tilbrigði við eldri sögu á þessum slóðum: Á útmánuðum 2024 nálgaðist Þór úlfskjaftinn aftan frá og í sumarbirtunni gekk hann framhjá kjaftinum en var sloppinn í ágúst þegar aftur fór að dimma og hélt þá áfram að feta sig frá úlfinum þangað til í október að hann sneri við og gekk kannski svona „níu fet“ til baka áður en hann sneri aftur við, skömmu eftir áramót, rétt við efri skoltinn, og hélt þá áfram sína leið – án þess að hafa náð að vega úlfinn í þetta skiptið (sbr. Time and Date AS).

Ekki þarf að ætla öllum almenningi að kunna skil á þeim stjörnufræðum sem menntaðar elítur í öllum memningarsamfélögum hafa á valdi sínu – og kappkosta að halda innan raða hinna innvígðu eins og kunnugt er allt frá dögum hinna fornu Egypta (Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1986, 54–69). Þannig halda menn völdum og áhrifum með því að þekkja tímatalið og geta haldið áttum á ferðum sínum. Það kemur valdafólki bara vel

að alþýðan botni ekki of mikið í slíku. Fólk sem þarf að mæta til alþingis á Þingvöllum á tilteknum vikudegi í tiltekinni viku sumars – að viðlögðum sektum og embættismissi – þarf til dæmis nauðsynlega að vita hvað tímanum líður. Og þá verður nauðsynlegt að hafa einhver föst viðmið á sjóndeildarhringnum sem marka sumar- og vetrarsólstöður, og jafndægrin á vori og hausti. Til gamans gæti maður líka hlaðið sér hringlaga heitan pott og lagt þráðbein göng að honum úr kjallaranum hjá sér og stillt þau þannig af að við sólaruppkomu um veturnætur skini sólin meðfram pottbrúninni og beint inn í göngin – til að vera viss um hvenær fyrsti vetrardagur ætti að vera (Gísli Sigurðsson 2022). Að minnsta kosti hefði Snorri getað stillt misseristalið sitt af með þessum hætti í Reykholti; tímatalskerfi sem kallaði á sumarauka stöku sinnum til að vetur og sumar héldust á sínum stað í tímatalinu og þingvikan á Þingvöllum færi ekki of langt frá sumarsólstöðunum – eins og rakið er til athugana Þorsteins surts á 10. öld (Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson 1990; Árni Björnsson 1990). Tímaskekkjuleiðréttingin í hinu forna íslenska tímatali var nákvæmari en í júlíanska tímatali miðaldakirkjunnar. Sem ætti ekki að draga úr tiltrú okkar á að menn af menntunarstigi Snorra hafi fylgst með og kunnað skil á gangi himintungla að fornu.

Að sjálfsögðu er júlíanska tímatalið (eða „gamli stíll“) eitt af því sem miðaldakirkjan flutti með sér og festi í sessi í samfélagi formæðra og -feðra Snorra. Til marks um það er að páskatafla er eitt af elstu varðveittu handritunum í Árnasafni. Hið forna og vel útfærða misseristal lifði þó góðu lífi áfram eins og margt af forneskjunni utan kirkjuársins, og heiti hinna fornu mánaða, og misseris- og vikutalið eru enn þann dag í dag lifandi þekking þótt búið sé að stilla það af miðað við hið núgildandi gregóríska tímatal („nýja stíl“). Þekking á tímatali hefur í öndverðu sennilega haldist í hendur við lærdóm skáldastéttarinnar sem notaði sömu þekkingu í sínum fræðum, hvort tveggja alveg óháð hinni gömlu heiðni og trúariðkun.

Um leið og við ljúkum þessari tilraun til að hugleiða heimildagildi Eddu Snorra á þeim forsendum sem gefnar eru í textanum um að Edda endurspegli lærdóm útvalins forréttindahóps hirðskáldanna á dögum Snorra, og sé prýðilega áreiðanleg heimild um hugmyndir þeirra um hina fornu heimsmynd og þær sögur og goðmögn sem henni tengdust, þarf ekki að koma á óvart að þeim goðmögnum sem tengjast skáldskapnum sé gert hátt undir höfði, og að karlgoðin séu meira áberandi í sögum Snorra en sögur ef þeim gyðjum sem hann þó nefnir með nafni og staðsetur vítt og breitt „á himni.“ Á dögum Snorra eru engar heimildir um að það hafi verið öðru kunnáttufólki í hinni goðfræðilegu heimssýn til að dreifa en þessum elítuskáldum sem héldu goðsögunum lifandi með tilvísun til himinsins – á sínum forsendum. Varla hefur til dæmis verið mikill kraftur í völvuhefðinni á þrettándu öld og þeirri kvenlegu sýn og þekkingu sem ætla má að hafi verið haldið á loft meðal þeirra sem hana iðkuðu á fyrri öldum – nema hún hafi kannski að einhverju leyti lifað áfram í kringum lækningar og jurtanytjar? Við höfum því miður engar fornar heimildir um aðra sýn á goðafræðina en þá sem yfirstéttarkarlar í stöðu Snorra höfðu; heimildir sem gætu gefið okkur annað sjónarhorn og verið þannig sambærilegar við vettvangsrannsóknir meðal annarra þjóðfélagshópa eru því miður ekki í boði.

Þrátt fyrir heimildaleysið getum við þó gengið útfrá því sem vísu að hugmyndir um hina fornu heiðni hafi alla tíð verið ólíkar eftir einstaklingum á ólíkum öldum, búsetu þeirra, kyni og þjóðfélagsstöðu – eins og öll önnur fræði í munnlegri geymd. Það breytir ekki því að það er líka fyllsta ástæða til að ætla að sú þekking sem hinir lærðustu karlar í hinu forna þjóðfélagi höfðu á valdi sínu, og höfðu festa á himninum með örnefnum og sögum sem breyttu óreiðu himinsins í staði og sali, hafi að hluta til lifað áfram í tengslum við þjálfun ungskálda – löngu eftir að hún hafði glatað sínu trúarlega hlutverki. Í því framhaldslífi hefur þekkingin tekið einhverjum breytingum og lagað sig að samtímanum, nýjum lærdómi, einstaklingum og ólíkum aðstæðum en samt alltaf verið rétt og heil á sinn hátt vegna þess að það vantaði aldrei neitt í himininn sem hélt þekkingunni saman í allra augsýn, undir hinum hvíta og hálfgegnsæja aski sem teygði limar sínar og rætur um himininn og niður fyrir sjóndeildarhringinn – eins og Björn Jónsson (1989) benti á að væri líklegast tilvísun í hina hvítu hálfgegnsæju vetrarbraut sem við sjáum enn þann dag í dag þegar ljósmengun nútímans byrgir ekki sýn til himins. Sviðið og leikritið sem goðsögurnar lýsa á himni breytist hægt og lítið þótt aldirnar líði. Af hverju ættu sögurnar þá að hafa breyst svo mjög á meðan hefðin lifði í hópi þeirra veraldlegu yfirstéttarskálda og menntamanna sem Snorri tilheyrði?

Heimildir

Árni Björnsson. 1990. „Tímatal“ [Chronology]. Í *Íslensk þjóðmenning* VII [Icelandic national culture VII], ritstj. Frosti F. Jóhannsson, 51–101. Bókaútgáfan Þjóðsaga.

Björn Jónsson. 1989. *Stjarnvísi í Eddum* [Star Myths of the Vikings]. Skjaldborg.

Faulkes, Anthony. 1982. „Introduction.“ Í Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, útg. Anthony Faulkes, xxi–xxxiv. Clarendon Press.

———, útg. 1998. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál* I. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

Gísli Sigurðsson. 2018a. „Orality.“ Í *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies*, ritstj. Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann og Stephen A. Mitchell, 391–8. De Gruyter.

———. 2018b. „Skyscape.“ Í *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies*, ritstj. Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann og Stephen A. Mitchell, 660–65. De Gruyter.

———. 2022. „How Gylfi's Illusion Breathes Life into the Sky.“ *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74: 231–46.

Gilman, Lisa og John Fenn. 2019. *Handbook for Folklore and Ethnomusicology Fieldwork*. Indiana University Press.

Hamacher, Duane (with Elders and Knowledge Holders). 2022. *The First Astronomers: How Indigenous Elders Read the Stars*. Allen & Unwin.

Heimir Pálsson. 2012. „Om källor och källbehandling i Snorris Edda: tankar kring berättelser om skapelsen“ [On sources and treatment of sources in Snorri's Edda: Thoughts on stories about creation]. *Scripta Islandica* 63: 43–57.

———. 2017. „Reflections on the Creation of Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda.“ *Scripta Islandica* 68: 189–232.

Hermann, Pernille. 2022. *Mnemonic Echoing in Old Norse Sagas and Eddas*. De Gruyter.

Lindow, John. 2002. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford University Press.

Selin, Helaine, ritstj. 2000. *Astronomy across Cultures*. Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Time and Date AS. „Night Sky Map & Planets Visible Tonight.“ www.timeanddate.com/astronomy/night/ sótt 1. mars 2024.

Þorsteinn Vilhjálmsson. 1986. *Heimsmynd á hverfanda hveli: sagt frá heimssýn vísindanna frá öndverðu fram yfir daga Newtons* I [Worldview on a Whirling Wheel: Recounting the worldview of science from the early days until Newton's time I]. Mál og menning.

———. 1990. „Raunvísindi á miðöldum“ [Science in the Middle Ages]. Í *Íslensk þjóðmenning* VII, ritstj. Frosti F. Jóhannsson, 1–50. Bókaútgáfan Þjóðsaga.

Í DYNGJU KVENNA

Heimir Pálsson*

Sú grein sem hér fer á eftir stendur nær því sem kalla mætti esseyju, hugun, en hinu sem nú tíðist að semja að siðum vísindaritgerða. Hún endurómar þannig þau samtöl sem við Terry Gunnell höfum átt okkar í milli undandanfarna hálfa öld og kveikjuna er að sjálfsögðu að finna í bók Terry Gunnell The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia (1995, 229–32). *Allar tilvitnanir til fornra texta eru samræmdar með íslenskri nútímastafsetningu. Með því móti þakka ég fyrir rökræður liðinnar tíðar og minnist sameiginlegra vina okkar.*

Hverjum er sagan sögð?

Meginefni þessarar hugunar er aðdragandinn að hjúskap þeirra Freys Njarðarsonar og Gerðar Gymisdóttur í fornum sögum og kvæðum, en mér þykir nauðsynlegt að fara fyrst fáeinum orðum um varðveislu goða- og hetjusagna áður en kom að bókritunaröldinni miklu, frá og með þrettándu öld til hinnar fimmtándu.

Líklega var það fjörug og skemmtileg bók Lars Lönnroths *Den dubbla scenen: Muntlig diktning från Eddan till ABBA* (1978) sem fyrst gerði mér almennilega ljóst að það er bara hálfnað verk við pælingar í munnlega varðveittum kvæðum og sögum ef við hyggjum einasta að *sögufólki* en spyrjum ekki að *áheyrendum*. Þulirnir og þulurnar, hvort heldur eru karlar eða konur, setja vitanlega sinn svip á efnið, en það sem flutt er tekur líka mið af áheyrendunum. Þetta er væntanlega svo augljóst að okkur gleymist stundum að taka það alvarlega: Sögur handa börnum eru öðruvísi en þær sem sagðar eru yfir bjórglasi á klukkustundum á klausturkrá. Oft heyrist líka sagt enn á okkar dögum að þessa og hina söguna segi maður nú ekki í blönduðum selskap.

Þau miðaldaheimili sem varðveittu málsmenningu íslenskrar þjóðar voru handverksheimili. Frek á vinnufólk, því allt var unnið í höndum. Að því er fjarska sjaldan vikið í fornum sögum eða heimildaritum, kannski vegna þess að það var svo

* Kennari við Uppsalaháskóla á eftirlaunum.

sjálfsagt og alkunnugt, að það hjóta að hafa verið í megindráttum tveir vinnustaðir: karla og kvenna, á hverju stórbýli. Þótt okkur sé tömust og tuggnust baðstofumyndin rómantíska, þar sem lesari eða kvæðamaður (afskaplega sjaldan kvæðakona, sem mér býður þó í grun hafi verið talsvert algengt) kemur í stað sjónvarpsins, þess sem sameinaði fjölskyldur fyrir daga nets og snjalltækja, segir heilbrigð skynsemi okkur að við vinnuna hafa konur lengstum haft sitt verkstæði, dyngjuna, karlar sína skemmu.

Ef horft er annars vegar til aldamótanna 1000 eins og venja er um formlega og pólitíska kristnitöku á Íslandi og hins vegar til aldamótanna 1200 sem hins fyrsta líklega skráningartíma goðsagnanna í þeirri Eddu sem jafnan er kennd Snorra Sturlusyni er ljóst að í einar tvær aldir hafa goðsögurnar eða efni þeirra lifað í munnlegri geymd frá þeim tíma þegar hvor tveggja voru þáttur í eiginlegum trúarbrögðum landsfólksins. Í lauslegu kynslóðatali eins og almennast er, merkir það allt að sex kynslóðum þar sem ein hefur sagt annarri sögurnar og þær vakið nægan áhuga til þess að ný kynslóð lagði þær á minnið og miðlaði áfram. Þótt ljóst sé að um þá munnlegu varðveislu sem þá fór fram verður ekkert vitað til hlítar, er af og frá að við getum látið sem ekkert sé, gleymt hálfri þriðju öld bókmenntasögunnar og látið allt byrja með snillingum þrettándu aldar. Þótt byggt verði á tilgátum einum eru það engu að síður þær sem hugsanlega geta hjálpað okkur til að þreifa okkur fram í rökkrinu.

Fyrir því er ágæt og gróin hefð að kalla íslensk fornrit mjög karllæg og leggja áherslu á hve rækilega hlutur kvenna sé þar skrifaður út úr samfélaginu. Þetta má vissulega kalla rétt, en ekki mega gleymast þau dæmi sem votta þekkingu kvenna og vitsmuni og þátt þeirra í varðveislunni. Hér verður ekki sett á bók neitt heildaryfirlit, en minna má á dæmi úr sagnfræðiritum: Ari Þorgilsson segir í 1. kafla Íslendingabókar að meðal heimildarfólks hans hafi verið Þuríður Snorradóttir goða (Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 4) sem hafi verið bæði margspök og óljúgfróð, og ríflega öld síðar bætir Snorri Sturluson við „Ari nam og marga fræði að Þuríði Snorradóttur goða. Hún var spök að viti. Hún mundi Snorra, föður sinn. Snorri var þá nær hálffertugur er kristni kom á Ísland…“ (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1945, 420–21). Þetta er ekki síst merkilegt vegna þess að svona er minnisþráður Ara rakinn drjúgan spöl aftur fyrir kristnitöku í vitnisburði þess manns sem venjulega er talinn hafa safnað best fróðleik um heiðinn átrúnað.

Skömmu eftir miðbik 13. aldar dreymdi Jóreiði Hermundardóttur í Miðdal (Miðjumdal) þrjá drauma þar sem heldur ógnvekjandi draumkona hafði uppi spásagnir. Aðspurð sagði hún sig vera Guðrúnu Gjúkadóttur. Það skiptir engu hvort við leggjum trúnað á þessa draumarakningu. Sú eða sá sem sagði söguna eins og hún er skráð í Króksfjarðarbók kunni skil á Guðrúnu Gjúkadóttur, annað hvort úr Völsunga sögu eða eddukvæðum (óskráðum á dögum Jóreiðar, eftir því sem best er vitað) og taldi fyllilega eðlilegt að sextán vetra stúlka þekkti til þeirra sagna sem þar var stuðst við. Ég sé ekkert í frásögninni sem skeri úr um hvort sá fróðleikur hefur verið fenginn úr skráðum sögum eða sögðum (sjá Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021b, 218–21). En hafi verið sagðar sögur af Guðrúnu eða flutt um hana kvæði finnst mér nauðsynlegt að hugsa dálítið um áheyrendurna.

Og þar kemur að efni sem væntanlega skiptir mjög miklu: Hvar og fyrir hvern voru sögurnar sagðar, kvæðin flutt? Það er ekki nóg að horfa á stíl og orðfæri sagna og kvæða heldur verður að spyrja um líklega áheyrendur.

Þegar að er gáð má finna fjölmörg dæmi í fornum ritum þar sem greint er frá yfirburða þekkingu og minni kvenna og stundum jafnvel tekið fram að þetta og hitt hafi þær lært af öðrum konum, þótt annað sé efni sem við tengjum oftar við lærdóm karla, til dæmis latínukunnátta.[1] Allar höfðu þær lært sín fræði án bóka (nema í eina dæminu þar sem nefnd er latínan). Njáll kenndi ungum sveinum lög áður en þau voru skráð og við heyrum einkum um samkomu karla kringum Lögberg, en það er mikill misskilningur ef fólk hugsar sér að engar sögur hafi verið sagðar í dyngju kvenna! Eða ef sú rómantíska mynd sem setur konur á Þingvöllum í Meyjarsæti er rétt, þá er varla meiningin að þær hafi setið þar þegjandi og beðið eftir að þeim væri boðið upp.

Það sem oftast verður okkur að fótakefli í þessu sambandi er skortur dæma um kvenna- og karlaefni, einkum bókmenntir. En kannski látum við okkur (viljandi?) sjást yfir sumt. Hér verður litið á sögu sem til er í einum fjórum (eða a.m.k. þrem) gerðum.

Tvennar sögur

Þegar rætt er um eddukvæðið *Skírnismál* eða *För Skírnis*, eins og kvæðið heitir í Konungsbók eddukvæða, sýnist tvennt bera hæst í túlkun nú orðið: Annars vegar er hefðbundin og að kalla má karllæg túlkun, oft kennd við frjósemistrú, sem þá er oft kölluð ást, og sýnir hvernig karlmannslostinn og þrjóskan þvingar kvenkynið til hlýðni, hins vegar femínísk túlkun sem byggir á svipuðum grunnskilningi en metur hann allt öðruvísi og leggur mesta áherslu á kúgun karla á konum.

Það er ekki erindi þessarar smágreinar að reyna að hrekja eða styðja aðra hvora túlkunina og því verður rannsóknarsaga ekki rakin, látið nægja að kenna frjósemistúlkunina við Magnus Olsen og grein hans „Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus“ (1909, 17–36) og hina femínísku við umfjöllun Helgu Kress í *Máttugum meyjum* (1993, 71–74).[2] En erindi mitt er að spyrja: Fór ekki fram tvennum sögum líka að fornu.

[1] Hér er hvorki staður né stund til að endursegja stórar frásagnir, en lesendum skal bent á þegar formóðir biskupa, Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir, fer með Varðlok(k)ur á Grænlandi eins og Halldís fóstra hennar hafði kennt henni (Einar Ól. Sveinsson og Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 207–8), þegar sagt er um Höllu Steinadóttur, móður Þorláks helga að hún hafi kennt honum ættvísi og mannfræði (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2002, 51), eða þegar Ingunn námsmær á Hólum „kenndi skólasveinum grammaticam og leiðrétti latínubækur“ meðan hún vann handavinnu eða tefldi (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson og Peter Foote 2003, 220).

[2] Lengi þótti mér afar skáldleg hugmynd Olsens um málmplöturnar, sólargeislann og jörðina. En síðustu árin hefur kenning femínistanna haft mikil áhrif á mig, ekki síst eins og hún birtist í *Blóðhófni* Gerðar Kristnýjar og úrvinnslu tónskáldsins Karin Rehnquist í *Blodhov* með aðstoð Svante Grogarn og Ensamble Recherche, auk ævintýralegrar túlkunar Lena Willemark á Gerði Gymisdóttur. Þá var gengið eins langt og hægt var, særingar Skírnis og móttökur Freys voru ekki bara tákn karlrembu og ofbeldis heldur beinlínis nauðgunar. – Það er athyglisvert að í grein sinni „Ser du dette sverdet, møy“ árið 1992 sagði Helga Kress: „*Skírnismál* er ett dikt om voldtekt.“ En ekki veit ég til að túlkun Willemark sé þaðan sprottin.

Auk frásagnarinnar af ferðum Skírnis í Skírnismálum eru þrjár gerðir lausamálssögu af fýsnum Freys í miðaldahandritum, tvær eru sögurnar í Gylfgaginningu í Snorra-Eddu og ein í lausamálsinngangi að kvæðinu í Konungsbók eddukvæða (GKS 2365 4to). Allir skipta þessir textar nokkru og eru því birtir hér í heild með samræmingu til íslenskrar nútímastafsetningar:

Bónorðsfrásögn í tveim gerðum Snorra-Eddu

Uppsalagerð **(*The Uppsala Edda* 2012, 54)**	**Konungsbókargerð** **(*Snorra-Edda* 2005, 33–34)**
A	**B**
Gymir hét maður en kona hans Örboða, hann var bergrisa ættar. Dóttir þeirra var Gerður, allra kvenna vænst. Það var einn dag að Freyr gekk í Hliðskjálf og sá um heim allan, og er hann leit í norðurætt, þá sá hann á einum bæ mikið hús, og þar gekk kona út, og lýsti af hári hennar bæði loft og lög, og svo hefndi honum það mikillæti er hann settist í það ið helga sæti að hann gekk brott fullur af harmi, og ekki svaf hann, er hann kom heim og þeir Skírnir hittust. Þá fór Skírnir að hitta Gerði og kom saman ástum þeirra. Hann fekk Skírni í hendur sverð sitt, en hann hafði þá ekki sverð er þeir Beli hittust, en drepa mátti hann Bela með hnefa sínum. En verra er honum það, þá er hann missir sverðsins er Múspells megir herja og hann berst við þá.	Gymir hét maður en kona hans Aurboða, hún var bergrisa ættar. Dóttir þeirra er Gerður, er allra kvenna er fegurst. Það var einn dag er Freyr hafði gengið í Hliðskjálf og sá of heima alla. En er hann leit í norðurætt, þá sá hann á einum bæ mikið hús og fagurt, og til þess húss gekk kona, og er hún tók upp höndum og lauk hurð fyrir sér þá lýsti af höndum hennar bæði í loft og á lög, og allir heimar birtust af henni. Og svo hefndi honum það mikla mikillæti er hann hafði sest í það helga sæti að hann gekk í braut fullur af harmi. Og er hann kom heim, mælti hann ekki, hvorki svaf hann né drakk. Engi þorði og krefja hann orða. Þá lét Njörður kalla til sín Skírni, skósvein Freys, og bað hann ganga til Freys og beiða hann orða og spyrja hverjum hann væri svo reiður að hann mælti ekki við menn. En Skírnir kvaðst ganga mundu, og eigi fús, og kvað illra svara vera von af honum. En er hann kom til Freys, þá spurði hann hví Freyr var svá hnipinn og mælti ekki við menn. Þá svarar Freyr og sagði að hann hafði séð konu fagra, og fyrir hennar sakar var hann svo harmsfullur að eigi mundi hann lengi lifa ef hann skyldi eigi ná henni. Og nú skaltu fara og biðja hennar mér til handa og hafa hana heim hingað hvort er faðir hennar vill eða eigi, og skal eg það vel launa þér. Þá svarar Skírnir, sagði svo að hann skal fara sendiferð en Freyr skal fá honum sverð sitt. Þat var svo gott sverð að sjálft vást. En Freyr lét eigi það til skorta og gaf honum sverðið. Þá fór Skírnir og bað honum konunnar og fekk heitið hennar, og níu nóttum síðar skyldi hún þar koma er Barey heitir og ganga þá að

Uppsalagerð **(*The Uppsala Edda* 2012, 54)**	**Konungsbókargerð** **(*Snorra-Edda* 2005, 33–34)**
A	**B**
	brullaupinu með Frey. En er Skírnir sagði Frey sitt eyrindi, þá kvað hann þetta: Löng er nótt, löng er önnur, hvé mega eg þreyja þrjár? Oft mér mánaður minni þótti en sjá hálf hýnótt. Þessi sök er til er Freyr var svo vopnlaus er hann barðist við Belja og drap hann með hjartar horni. Þá mælir Gangleri: Undur mikið er þvílíkur höfðingi sem Freyr er vildi gefa sverð svo að hann átti eigi annað jafngott. Geysimikið mein var honum það þá er hann barðist við þann er Beli heitir. Það veit trúa mín að þeirrar gjafar mundi hann þá iðrast. Þá svarar Hár: Lítið mark var þá að er þeir Beli hittust. Drepa mátti Freyr hann með hendi sinni. Verða mun það er Frey mun þykja verr við koma, er hann missir sverðsins þá er Muspells synir fara og herja.

Inngangur kvæðisins í Konungsbók eddukvæða (2014, 380)

C
Freyr, sonur Njarðar, hafði einn dag sest í Hliðskjálf og sá um heima alla. Hann sá í jötunheima og sá þar mey fagra, þá er hún gekk frá skála föður síns til skemmu. Þar af fékk hann hugsóttir miklar. Skírnir hét skósveinn Freys. Njörður bað hann kveðja Frey máls. Þá mælti Skaði: Rístu nú Skírnir, og gakk að beiða okkarn mála mög …

Fljótt á litið eru þetta snoðlíkar frásagnir, svo langt sem þær ná. Samt kann að vera ómaksins vert að hyggja nánar að líkindum og ólíkindum.

Samhljóða eða mjög líkt

A	**B**	**C**	**Skírnismál**
Dóttir þeirra var Gerður, allra kvenna vænst.	Dóttir þeirra er Gerður, er allra kvenna er fegurst.		
Það var einn dag að Freyr gekk í Hliðskjálf og sá um heim allan, og er hann leit í norðurætt, þá sá hann á einum bæ mikið hús,	Það var einn dag er Freyr hafði gengið í Hliðskjálf og sá of heima alla. En er hann leit í norðurætt, þá sá hann á einum bæ mikið hús og fagurt	Freyr, sonur Njarðar, hafði einn dag sest í Hliðskjálf og sá um heima alla.	Í Gymis görðum eg sá ganga mér tíða mey; armar lýstu en af þaðan allt loft og lögur.
og svo hefndi honum það mikillæti er hann settist í það ið helga sæti að hann gekk brott fullur af harmi.	Og svo hefndi honum það mikla mikillæti er hann hafði sest í það helga sæti að hann gekk í braut fullur af harmi.		
Og ekki svaf hann, er hann kom heim	Og er hann kom heim, mælti hann ekki, hvorki svaf hann né drakk.		

Ólíkar frásagnir, afbrigði í upplýsingum

A	**B**	**C**	***Skírnismál***
Gymir hét maður en kona hans Aurboða, hann var bergrisa ættar.	Gymir hét maður en kona hans Aurboða, hún var bergrisa ættar.		
og þar gekk kona út, og lýsti af hári hennar bæði loft og lög	og til þess húss gekk kona, og er hún tók upp höndum og lauk hurð fyrir sér þá lýsti af höndum hennar bæði í loft og á lög, og allir heimar birtust af henni.	Hann sá í jötunheima og sá þar mey fagra, þá er hún gekk frá skála föður síns til skemmu.	Í Gymis görðum eg sá ganga mér tíða mey; armar lýstu en af þaðan allt lopt ok lögr.
Hann fekk Skírni í hendur sverð sitt	Þá svarar Skírnir, sagði svo að hann skal fara		Mar gefðu mér þá, þann er mig um

A	B	C	*Skírnismál*
	sendiferð en Freyr skal fá honum sverð sitt. Það var svo gott sverð að sjálft vóst. En Freyr lét eigi þat til skorta og gaf honum sverðið.		myrkvan beri vísan vafurloga og það sverð er sjálft vegist við jötna ætt.
Þá fór Skírnir at hitta Gerði og kom saman ástum þeira.	Þá fór Skírnir og bað honum konunnar og fekk heitið hennar		***För Skírnis*, bónorðið,** **11. til 39. erindi**
			Freyr kvað: Löng er nótt, langar ero tvær, hve um þreyja þrjár? Oft mér mánaður minni þótti en sjá hálf hýnótt.

Orðalagslíkingar Snorra-Eddu-gerðanna og lausamálsins með eddukvæðinu eru allar þess eðlis að lykilatriði eru líkleg til að varðveitast í munnsögum (allra kvenna *vænst/fegurst*; *sá um heim allan/heima alla*; *hefndi – mikillæti – helga sæti – fullur af harmi*). Þessutan sýnist mér ljóst að það er ágætlega rökstutt þegar Terry Gunnell komst að þeirri niðurstöðu (1995, 232) að Phillpott hefði haft rétt fyrir sér þegar hún leiddi að því rök að prósatextinn sem fylgdi goðakvæðunum væri „superfluous in a majority of cases, and where it is not superfluous it is inadequate.“ Að því er varðar kynningartextann með Skírnismálum er hann gersamlega óþarfur ef kvæðið er flutt, hvort heldur er af einum eða mörgum.

Allt af einni rót

Það hefur verið ríkjandi óskhyggja og tengd bókfestukenningum að trúa því að textabrigði sagna séu öll runnin af einni rót, og að hana megi nálgast með því að bera tilbrigðin nógu vandlega saman. Það segir sig sjálft að í okkar dæmi er hægast að gera ráð fyrir því að lengsta gerðin sé elst, hinar, hver annarri styttri, leiddar af henni. Í þessu dæmi væri þá *För Skírnis* vitnisburður um lengstu og þá elstu gerðina, Konungsbókargerð Snorra-Eddu næsta þrep og Uppsalagerðin stytting Konungsbókarinnar.

Fljótt á litið sýnist þetta fá ágætan stuðning í því að Konungsbókargerð Snorra-Eddu vitnar til kvæðisins, rekur skilmála Gerðar og tekur upp úr kvæðinu eina vísu. En sú

vísa er reyndar afskaplega laustengd við frásögn kvæðisins. Efnislega tjáir hún lostaþrá ungmennis, ekki Freys fremur en annarra. Orðið *hýnótt* er óþekkt nema hér, og fróðlegt er að lesa skýringar Ásgeirs Blöndals Magnússonar í *Orðsifjabók* (1989, 404). Hann telur merkingu óljósa en bendir á að einir hafi skýrt hýnótt sem ‚þessi nótt' aðrir „ætla að orðið merki ‚brúðkaupsnóttaskeið' eða nóttina fyrir brúðkaupið" (1989, 405). Þar sem ekki er við neitt að styðjast nema *Skírnismál* kynni einhver að segja sem svo að hýnótt hljóti að vera ‚átján nætur' þar sem níu nætur séu hálf hýnótt!

Án ábyrgðar mætti spyrja hvort ekki sé einmitt sennilegt að einstætt orð eins og *hýnótt* hafi gert þetta unglingsstef minnisstætt. Og býsna líklegt að þessi vísa um unglingsfýsnir hafi verið húsgangur og allsendis óháð bónorðssögunni. Og þar sem þekkt ritgerð *Skírnismála* er yngri til muna en ritaðar gerðir Snorra-Eddu er eðlilegra geta þess til að vísan sé höfð fyrir lokaerindi kvæðisins vegna þess að hugkvæmum söguþul Konungsbókargerðar Snorra-Eddu hafði dottið í hug að hnýta henni aftan við söguna, enda hafi hann/hún kannast við frásögnina eins og hún er í kvæðinu.

Hér er nauðsynlegt að minnast þess að Snorri *samdi* ekki Gylfaginningu í þeim skilningi að hann hafi búið til sögurnar sem þar eru sagðar. Hann skipaði þeim í röð, ritstýrði með þeim hætti að aðdáun vekur. En sögurnar hafði hann heyrt sagðar, sumar hverjar áreiðanlega í ólíkum gerðum. Hann þekkti til dæmis og notaði tvær sköpunarsögur bæði þá sem fór sömu leið og Genesis og lyfti jörð úr sæ, og hina sem gerði ráð fyrir að jörð væri sköpuð úr holdi Ymis.[3]

Það segir sig sjálft að undir lok tólftu aldar, þegar Snorri var fullorðinn maður að hverfa frá Rangárvöllum í Borgarfjörð, og sagðar höfðu verið á Íslandi sögur af goðunum, fyrst í einhverskonar heiðni í rífa öld og síðan í kristnu samfélagi í hartnær þrjár aldir, hafa orðið til ýmisleg tilbrigði, ýmsar gerðir sagnanna. Snorri hafði áreiðanlega heyrt sumar í uppvextinum, en svo voru líka vísast til sögur sem höfðu þróast talsvert öðruvísi við Hvítá en við Rangá.

Rannsóknir mínar á Uppsala-Eddu á 21. öld hafa sannfært mig um að flest rök hnígi til þess að sú gerð Gylfaginningar sem afrituð var í handritið DG 11 4to hafi verið eins nærri því að vera frumgerð verksins og komist verður. Konungsbókargerðin, sú sem kynnast má í GKS 2367 4to, AM 242 fol. og Utrecht 1374 sé endurskoðuð og aukin. Oft er þar einkanlega um að ræða lengdar og liprari málsgreinar, en stundum líka aðrar sagnagerðir og beina viðauka.

Bónorðssögnin sem hér um ræðir væri gott dæmi um að ritstjóri Konungsbókargerðarinnar hefur haft aðgang að lengri og fyllri gerð sögunnar en notuð hafði verið í fyrstu gerð. En eins og hér verður rakið var það afbrigði sömu sögu og af öðrum toga en sú var sem sögð var í kvæðinu.

[3] Það er svo rétt að undirstrika að um það verður ekkert fullyrt hvort hann hafi kunnað tvær gerðir Völuspár um sköpunina aðra með hugmyndina um að „ekki var" og hina að „Ymir byggði". Hann hefur að sjálfsögðu getað lagað vísuna svo hún stangaðist ekki á við þá sköpunarsöguna sem hann hafði kosið að nota.

Freyr fekk Gerðar – *För Skírnis*

Í forriti DG 11 4to hafa verið settar fyrirsagnir sem skapa þeirri gerð Snorra-Eddu talsverða sérstöðu. Sá stutti kafli sem hér var sýndur framar hefur fyrirsögnina Freyr fekk Gerðar, og sé hún borin saman við heiti kvæðisins í Codex regius *För Skírnis*, má kalla sé sagt það sem máli skiptir um mun sagnanna.

Þótt orðalagsmunur sé nokkur á Uppsalagerð og Konungsbókargerð ber þeim að kalla má ekkert á milli nema lokasamtal Freys og Skírnis og vísa Freys.

Hins vegar er býsna athyglisvert að hvorug frásögnin nefnir hestinn, og það er ekki bara sérkennilegt vegna þess að þá hefur Skírnir engan að tala við, heldur miklu fremur vegna þess að það er gott tákn þess að ekki standi til að segja ferðasögu í Jötunheima.

Að fráteknum Mannheimum sem koma afskaplega lítið við sögu í goðafræðinni má heita að allir viðburðir í sögum af goðunum eigi sér stað í Goðheimum, Jötunheimum eða Helheimum. Svartálfaheimur verður svið dvergasmíðinnar og heimkynni þeirra Ægis og Ránar er í sjó, þótt Ægir haldi ásum veislu á eyjunni Hlésey. Milli heimanna, einkum þó Goðheima, Jötunheima og Helheima eru glögg og torfær landamæri.[4] Eins og alþekkt mun vera í shamaniskum fræðum þarf sérstök farartæki eða einstæða fararskjóta til að komast milli heima.

Án þess að um það sé rætt í eddufræðum má telja líklegt að þarna sé að finna skýringu á sérkennilegum fararskjótum og dráttardýrum ása, köttum Freyju, höfrum Þórs, Gullinbursta Freys, hinum áttfætta Sleipni, Gulltoppur er hestur Heimdallar en ekki má heldur gleyma valshömum Friggjar og Freyju eða flugskóm Loka. Þeir feðgarnir, Óðinn og Þór ferðast í vagni og á Sleipni, en oft er þó ekkert um það getið (svo sjálfsagt, það vita nú allir?), og Þór reynist komast ferða sinna vaðandi bæði í Geirröðargarða yfir ána Vimur (þó með stuðningi við Gríðarvöl) og í sjó eftir viðureignina við Miðgarðsorm. Hamskipti virðast líka gegna hlutverki þarna: Óðinn tekur á sig ormslíki til að komast inn í Hnitbjörg, en arnarlíki til að komast út með skáldamjöðinn. Minna má einnig á að Hermóði er lánaður Sleipnir þegar hann fer að leita samninga við Hel.

Þegar til þessa er horft er mjög skiljanlegt að skósveinn og leikfélagi Freys vilji fá hest goðsins til að ríða í Jötunheima. En jafnskiljanlegt að þess gerist engin þörf þegar ekki stendur til að segja frá ferðinni. Því það sýnist einmitt greina gerðir sögunnar rækilega að: Önnur gerir för Skírnis og særingar yfir Gerði að meginatriði, hin er partur af upplýsingakerfi Gylfaginningar, ætlað það meginhlutverk að greina frá því að frjósemisguðinn kvæntist jötnameyju, nákvæmlega eins og faðir hans, Njörður, sem gekk í hjúskap með jötnameyjunni Skaði.

Ef litið er til þeirra fáu barneigna sem nefndar eru í sögum af guðunum verður áberandi að þegar mikið liggur við er blandað blóði milli reiðu og óreiðu, Váli, hefnandinn eftir víg Baldurs, er samkvæmt íslensku sögninni sonur jötnakonunnar Rindar og Óðins.[5] Hefnandi Óðins, Viðar, er að skilja má sonur tröllkonunnar Gríðar og

[4] Líklega er torfært yfir í Svartálfaheim, enda fer enginn þangað nema Loki, sem á sérstaka flugskó, og Þór kemur honum til hjálpar, enda vel settur með vagn sinn.

[5] Samkvæmt Saxo var Rindur (Rinda) konungsdóttir, en sem sagt ekki gyðja fremur en í Eddu.

Óðins. Sif, kona Þórs, er aldrei nefnd móðir Magna, Móða og Þrúðar, barna Þórs, og hann er stjúpi Ullar, sonar Sifjar, en faðir Ullar er ekki nefndur.

Það þarf því hreint ekki að koma á óvart að frjósemisguðinum Frey sé ætluð kona úr Jötunheimum. Hitt er athyglisverðara að Eddu-gerðirnar minnast aldrei á Jötunheima, Uppsalabókargerðin segir að faðirinn sé „bergrisa ættar", en Konungsbókargargerð að „hún var bergrisa ættar." Verður ekki annað séð en nóg sé að önnur ættin komi úr Jötunheimum.

Það sérkennilegasta er þó sjálft bónorðið. Það er meginatriði í kvæðinu og kjarni þess en kemur eiginlega ekkert við sögu í Gylfaginningu. Þar sé ég aðeins eina nýtilega skýringu.

Tveir áheyrendahópar

Í umfjöllun sinni um aldur *Skírnismála* fór Vésteinn Ólason rækilega yfir mikilvægustu aldursrökin. Hann taldi miklu skipta að „engin sérstök einkenni tengja kvæðið kristni eða öldunum eftir kristnitöku" og bætti við: „Sennilegast er að það sé frumkveðið í heiðni eða a.m.k. meðan heiðnar goðsagnir lifðu góðu lífi í hugum fólks. Hvort sem Skírnismál hafa verið flutt með leikrænum hætti eða án verulegra leikrænna tilburða hlaut textinn að vera breytingum undirorpinn" (*Eddukvæði* I 2014, 200).

Í röksemdafærslu Vésteins sýnist vega þungt að: „Líklegt er að Snorri hafi þekkt kvæðið og þá sennilega með nokkurn veginn þeim inngangi sem það hefur í K" (sama rit, 199). Áður hef ég nefnt þá túlkun Terry Gunnell að raunar sé lausa málið í Konungsbók eddukvæða allsendis óþarft þegar flytja ætti kvæðið. En svo er einnig á það að benda að í þessum kvæðisinngangi er að því er best verður séð ekkert sem ekki væri hægt að semja með frásögn annarrar hvorrar gerðar Snorra-Eddu að fyrirmynd. Og þá skal einnig tekið fram að samkvæmt rannsóknum mínum (Uppsala-Edda 2022) er ekki á vísan Snorra Sturluson að róa í Konungsbókargerð Eddu, þar sem sú gerð inniheldur ýmislegt efni, sem nokkuð áreiðanlega er ekki frá Snorra komið heldur viðaukar annars ritstjóra.[6]

Freysleikur karla – fræði kvenna

Það sem hér hefur verið rakið leiðir ljóslega til einfaldrar tilgátu:

Sú saga sem okkur er sögð í *För Skírnis* er sú sem líklega endurspeglar þann Freysleik sem karlar léku, hvort heldur var einkum til að minnast guðsins Freys eða til að efla frjósemi móður jarðar.

Sú fáorða frásögn sem Edda segir okkur í báðum gerðunum er það sem talið var í dyngju kvennanna fróðleikurinn sem rétt væri að halda til haga um hjúskap frjósemisguðsins.

[6] Þar sem þau rök eru oft notuð um aldur eddukvæða að þau séu líklega talsvert gömul ef Snorri reynist hafa þekkt þau og talið þau forn er mjög mikilvægt að kanna um leið hvort gerðir Snorra-Eddu séu samstiga og öruggt sé að verið er að vísa til Snorra.

Máttug og skáldleg túlkun Gerðar Kristnýjar í Blóðhófni og sviðsetning, tónlist og leikur þeirra Karin Rehnquist og Lena Willemark (nú á YouTube) er femínísk túlkun á því ofbeldi sem framið er í För Skírnis, ekki þeim fróðleik sem formæður okkar héldu til haga um það er Freyr fékk Gerðar.

Heimildir

Ásdís Egilsdóttir, ritstj. 2002. *Þorláks saga byskups in elzta.* Íslenzk fornrit 16. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon. 1989. *Íslensk orðsifjabók* [Icelandic etymological dictionary]. Orðabók háskólans.

Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ritstj. 1945. Snorri Sturluson. *Ólafs saga ins helga in sérstaka.* Íslenzk fornrit 27. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Eddukvæði I = Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason, ritstj. 2014. *Eddukvæði*. 1. b.: Goðakvæði. 2 bindi. Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson og Matthías Þórðarson, ritstj. 1935. *Eiríks saga rauða. Grænlendinga saga.* Íslenzk fornrit 4. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Faulkes, Anthony, ritstj. 2005. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. 2. útg. Viking Society for Northern Research.

Gerður Kristný. 2010. *Blóðhófnir* [Bloodhoof]. Mál og menning.

Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, ritstj. 2021a. *Sturlunga saga eða Íslendinga sagan mikla* I. Íslenzk fornrit 20. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

———, ritstj. 2021b. *Sturlunga saga eða Íslendinga sagan mikla* III. Íslenzk fornrit 22. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Gunnell, Terry. 1995. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia.* D. S. Brewer.

Heimir Pálsson, ritstj. 2012. Snorri Sturluson. *The Uppsala Edda: DG 11 4to*, þýð. Anthony Faulkes. Viking Society for Northern Research.

———. 2022. *Uppsala Edda The Textbook DG 11 4o*, þýð. Kelsey Paige Hopkins. Acta Bibliothecae Scarensis 54. Uppsala universitet.

Helga Kress. 1992. „Ser du dette sverdet, møy?“ [Do you see this sword, maiden?] *Edda* 3: 203–15.

———. 1993. *Máttugar meyjar: Íslensk fornbókmenntasaga* [Mighty maidens: Old Icelandic literary history]. Háskóli Íslands – Háskólaútgáfan.

Jakob Benediktsson, ritstj. 1968. *Íslendingabók Ara Þorgilssonar*. Íslenzk fornrit 1, fyrri hluti. Hið íslenska fornritafélag.

Lönnroth, Lars. 1978. *Den dubbla scenen: Muntlig diktning från Eddan till ABBA* [The double scene: Oral poetry from Edda to ABBA]. Bokförlaget Prisma.

Olsen, Magnus. 1909. „Fra gammmelnorsk myte og kultus“ [On Old Norse myth and cult]. *Maal og minne*: 17–36.

Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson og Peter Foote, ritstj. 2003. *Jóns saga ins helga.* Íslenzk fornrit 15, síðari hluti. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Vésteinn Ólason. 2014. „Formáli. § 10. Skírnismál.“ Í *Eddukvæði I: Goðakvæði,* útg. Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason, 185–200. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

LIFE, DEATH AND A WARRIOR'S MORALITY

Declan Taggart*

Afterlife beliefs are almost a cultural universal.[1] As humans, we struggle with the concept that consciousness ends when the body shuts down and instead naturally suppose that cognitive and social functions remain active after death (Hodge 2018). The nature of our hereafters is therefore a pressing concern for many: life will hopefully be long, but death will be longer. Yet death can also be perceived as an opportunity, especially when moral criteria are invoked for entry to a favourable afterlife (cf. Taggart 2022a). Beliefs in moralistic afterlives are held in many communities, but their presence in Old Norse religion is usually dismissed, hints of their existence being supposed to be Christian influence and the Old Norse gods usually regarded as disinterested in human conduct (but see Raffield, Price and Collard 2019; Taggart 2024). However, candidates for moral afterlives do survive in Old Norse literature, the most well-known of which is Óðinn's hall, Valhǫll.[2]

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the potential impact that the Valhǫll tradition had directly and indirectly on generating or maintaining behaviours that could be called *moral*, paying particular attention to the implications for social stability and martial hierarchies. To reconstruct the likely effects of the Valhǫll mythos on individuals in early Scandinavia, I draw on cross-cultural studies from the social sciences that scrutinise how religious ideologies and narratives guide modern-day behaviour. The endeavour is, therefore, a somewhat speculative one; regardless of how robust those

* University of Iceland.

[1] This chapter is based on a presentation I gave at the Aarhus Old Norse Mythology Conference 2021 at Reykjavíkur Akademían as part of a RANNÍS-funded research project (207157-051). Many thanks to the participants for their questions and comments, and apologies where I have not been able to take them into account for reasons of space. I am also indebted to Marianne Moen, Sophie Bønding, Ben Raffield and Christian Cooijmans, my collaborators on the Nordforsk-funded project "Making a Warrior" (NOS-HS 150106), for their feedback on this paper and influence on my ideas, as well as to both funding bodies.

[2] For an overview of previous scholarship on Valhǫll, see Hultgård 1994, 2011; Nordberg 2004.

modern investigations are, it is difficult to reliably trace the impact of literary imagery onto real-world behaviour in any era, never mind one so poorly recorded as the Viking Age. Nevertheless, the social sciences can provide a framework for questioning and understanding Old Norse religious ideology, and no reconstruction of past behaviour is ever fully accurate, due partly to problems of evidence and partly to the necessity of reductionism to isolate the object of research. Therefore, as Jens Peter Schjødt argues about this problem, "a decisive criteria for evaluating the model must be the extent to which it enlightens reality" (2009, 18), and even if this chapter's model of the Viking Age warband is inaccurate, I hope it is part of a gradual movement towards a better understanding of such groups, their comportment and their social relations.

The term *morality* will be used descriptively here as "certain codes of conduct put forward by a society or a group (such as a religion), or accepted by an individual for her own behaviour" (Gert and Gert 2016). However, the less loaded *prosocial* will largely be employed, denoting activities that are positive, helpful and intended to benefit other members of a community like sharing, hospitality or volunteering (on the distinction between morality and prosociality, see Turiel 2015).

A Selective Afterlife

Valhǫll is mentioned surprisingly little in texts that might plausibly have been created by active worshippers of Old Norse gods. In the *Poetic Edda*, it is brought up by name only in *Grímnismál*, *Vǫluspá*, the probably younger *Hyndluljóð* and in the prose of the heroic texts (although *Atlakviða* 2, 14 is a strange exception, and Snorri quotes a relevant measure of eddic verse in *Skáldskaparmál* v142); amongst the skaldic poems, *Valhǫll* only crops up in *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, two poems that actually have eddic features (cf. the difficult-to-date *Icelandic Rune Poem* 4).[3] To facilitate drawing conclusions from this evidence, I therefore include allusions to any warrior afterlife overseen by Óðinn from ninth- and tenth-century poetry, i.e. those contemporary with the earliest extant remarks on Valhǫll. Even if those references did not originally signify Valhǫll, they are functionally analogous enough to have produced a similar effect on their audiences.

According to that evidence, Valhǫll is a rewarding afterlife for elite warriors with selective criteria for entry. A recurring yardstick is bravery in battle (*Eiríksmál* 6, 7; *Lokasenna* 22; implied in *Hákonarmál* 1–2, 9–14; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 37–39; cf. *Gesta Danorum* viii.5.1).[4] Indeed, in *Eiríksmál* 6, engaging in violence over a wide area is the major criterion for invitation. Cited repeatedly is the notion of an individual's elite social status (*Darraðarljóð* 7; *Eiríksmál* 2, 6; *Hákonarmál* 1, 16; *Hárbarðsljóð* 24; cf. *Gesta Danorum* ii.7.21 and perhaps i.8.14), while also mentioned are wisdom (*Eiríksmál* 8), the protection

[3] Eddic poems are cited from Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014; on their dating, see Sapp 2022. Other primary texts are organised by name in the bibliography alongside details of their editions. For later poetry and evidence in other media, see Hultgård 2011.

[4] Sending people to Óðinn is a metaphor for killing in Christian and non-Christian poetry (as Hel is often equated with death in general): e.g. *Gráfeldardrápa* 2; *Haraldskvæði* 12; *Poem about Hákon* 1; Tindr, *Hákonardrápa* 11). The stanza by Tindr, in particular, suggests that the metaphor is based on a tradition linking a violent demise with Valhǫll as, say, *Hárbarðsljóð* does.

and good stewardship of territory (*Hákonarmál* 4, 19–21) and the maintenance of religious sites (*Hákonarmál* 18). I have attempted to separate general praise from accolades specifically linked with being worthy of entry to Valhǫll, but in *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* it can be tough to separate the latter material from the normal content of a praise poem for a leader, which likewise deals with their victories in war and lineage, for example. However, the crossover here is unlikely to be incidental. Leaders are being rewarded with an afterlife that accords with the behavioural expectations appropriate to their status (on the morality of acting according to social station, especially for rulers, see Taggart, forthcoming).

In summary, early texts offer a clear perception of the *einherjar*, the residents of Valhǫll, being selected based on their behaviour, although there is some confusion over whether that choice is made before death or after and which supernatural entity is responsible for judgement, Óðinn, *valkyrjur* or apparently the *einherjar* themselves (compare e.g. *Darraðarljóð* 6; *Eiríksmál* 6; *Fáfnismál* 43; *Grímnismál* 8; *Hákonarmál* 1; *Lokasenna* 22; *Vafþrúðnismál* 41, as well as the word *valkyrja* 'chooser of the slain' itself; cf. *Atlamál* 27).[5] There is variety in the criteria attached to entrance, which suggests a degree of poetic licence and/or circumstantiality. Perhaps any of a deceased leader's positive characteristics could be praised and used as justification by the living for Óðinn having invited them to his hall, provided that it was behaviour appropriate to their social status. That level of variation implies that falling in battle was not always seen as necessary, which presumably would have been a salve to members of the upper classes who had lost loved ones to sickness or old age, and the ritual means for assuring entry to Valhǫll described in late prose texts like *Heimskringla* (p. 22) do find parallels in the staging of some elite graves (for further parallels and discussion, see Dutton 2015; Nordberg 2004; such rituals do not seem necessary in e.g. *Frá dauða Sinfjǫtla*; *Ynglingatal* 3). Nevertheless, it seems unlikely from the above material that someone who was not perceived as a leader or warrior (especially an elite one) would have been expected to achieve entry, with ritual assistance or not, except under the special circumstances described below.

Valhǫll's desirability is understandable, particularly for a northern martial milieu (see further Nordberg 2004). Its organisational structure is that of an idealised Viking Age court, in which the best warriors are most dignified and rewarded. The hero Helgi is elevated to rulership of the hall alongside Óðinn, for example, while his enemy is relegated to menial work (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 39; similarly, *Eiríksmál* 1; *Hákonarmál* 16; *Hyndluljóð* 2). Essentially it is a masculine warrior fantasy. Alcohol is served by divine women (*Eiríksmál* 1; *Grímnismál* 36); the *einherjar* are greeted by divinities or heroes (*Eiríksmál* 5; *Hákonarmál* 14; cf. the contemporary iconography discussed in Hultgård 2011; Oehrl 2017); the tables are filled with an unending supply of meat and drink (*Grímnismál* 18, 25); and, perhaps most attractive of all to these texts' audiences, ferocious battle becomes sport, an aspirational space for displays of masculinity, conducted in peace (*Hákonarmál* 16; *Vafþrúðnismál* 41; cf. *Gesta Danorum* viii.5.1 and perhaps i.8.14).

[5] The *valkyrjur* are Óðinn's divine subordinates and the heroines of many heroic poems.

Descriptions of the building and its surroundings emphasise that more than one poet saw Valhǫll as a (martial) paradise: it is in Glaðsheimr in *Grímnismál* 8, a place name with connotations of cheerfulness and brightness, especially of weather; the most beautiful of trees, golden-leaved Glasir, stands outside it in in *Skáldskaparmál* v142; in *Hákonarmál* 13, it is surrounded by the green homelands of the gods (cf. *Grímnismál* 4; *Hyndluljóð* 1); and in several poems the space is inherently combat-oriented, from its inhabitants' activities to the shields that serve for shingles on its roof (*Grímnismál* 9; *Haraldskvæði* 11; *Ragnarsdrápa* 12). So desirable is this Óðinnic afterlife in texts like *Hákonarmál* and *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* that those works ultimately do not just honour their fallen heroes but, partly in service of that aim, actively construct the desirability of their destinations, which boosts the social cache of the Valhǫll mythos as a result and makes more likely the ramifications described below. Because of the lurking threat of Ragnarǫk (spelled out in *Eiríksmál* 7, though also underpinning e.g. *Grímnismál* 23; Tindr, *Hákonardrápa* 8, 11; cf. *Vǫluspá* K42, K51, which may imply an opposing force in Hel), inflating the ranks of the *einherjar* may in fact be a sacred duty. Whether that means individuals must murder prospective candidates or achieve entry through death themselves, this is another incentive to fulfil Valhǫll's selection criteria.

A final quirk of the Valhǫll mythology is that the high-born leaders welcomed into that warrior paradise can be accompanied by their armies (*Eiríksmál* 1–2, 8–9; *Hákonarmál* 9–10; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 40–41). This is as much a marker of respect for dead rulers as the trope of their ferocity in battle, honouring them through reminders of their great military power (cf. *Eiríksmál* 3–4). Equally it appears relatively widely in the extant literature, where it is rationalised as a means of bolstering the armies of the gods, and a similar narrative of households accompanying leaders into the grave persists in later prose about Iceland's settlement (especially *Eyrbyggja saga* 19, but also perhaps e.g. *Landnámabók* 98, 140), so this could reflect a genuine religious tradition. If so, it offers an unambiguous incitement for lower-class individuals who desire a favourable afterlife to attach themselves to a leader who might go to Valhǫll.

Reward, Punishment and Impact

The honorand of this volume (Gunnell 2013, 167; cf. Nygaard 2019, 57) has noted links between the Valhǫll complex and the attractiveness of service in a retinue, and this must be true. The logic is obvious: the promise of an Óðinnic afterlife should make warriors more willing to cooperate with one another, follow the instructions of leaders and take risks.[6] Recent research into the behavioural impact of perceptions of supernatural reward and punishment provides further backing for this supposition.

Studies in this field do not form an easy consensus, due to disagreements over methodology and interpretation, and it can be problematic to generalise from the

[6] Religious primes also encourage risk-taking (e.g. Kupor, Laurin and Levav 2015; White, Dean and Laurin 2024), suggesting that religion alone could make battle more palatable for warriors. However, the relationship between primes and real-world stimuli is unlikely to be one-to-one, and afterlife reward is only one factor in modern-day religious violence (Alcorta and Sosis 2022).

experiments of surveys or controlled studies to everyday situations. Nevertheless, some trends do appear cross-culturally: belief in a punishing deity appears to discourage antisocial practices like cheating or selfishness and promote cooperation, whereas people cheat more under the aegis of a forgiving god (e.g. Purzycki et al. 2016; Lang et al. 2019; Shariff and Norenzayan 2011; White and Norenzayan 2019; Yilmaz and Bahçekapili 2016). Afterlife beliefs specifically can be an incentive to certain types of conduct. According to one now-heavily referenced investigation, crime rates are lower in nations in which a higher proportion of people believe in hell; conversely, belief in heaven predicts higher crime rates (Shariff and Rhemtulla 2012; cf. Atkinson and Bourrat 2011; Graeff and Svendsen 2020; Willard et al. 2020). Punishment does seem to incite prosociality to a greater degree than reward, although some of the studies cited above do suggest that both have an effect (compare, e.g., White and Norenzayan 2019 with Yilmaz and Bahçekapili 2016). However, denial of reward can apparently act much like punishment, so the threat of losing access to a paradise may be as powerful a motivator as the promise of eternity in a pit of torture (cf. Cohen and Schwartz 2013; Coşgel and Miceli 2018).

Potentially being deprived of Valhǫll may therefore be a powerful impetus for prosocial conduct. Besides the risk-taking activity that is central to the moral code governing entry, according to the above studies, the dangling threat of supernatural punishment will also encourage behaviours within the in-group that are not anywhere explicitly connected to Valhǫll like altruism, generosity, honesty and self-sacrifice. Theoretically, warriors should work harder in service of their community, and it is interesting, therefore, that hard work has a moral dimension in many Old Norse texts, such as *Hávamál* 59 and the coal-biter trope of saga literature (see Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005; laziness has a moral valuation in many cultures, underpinning, for instance, fatphobic stereotypes: see e.g. Atherton 2021). Therefore, the threat of being passed over for Valhǫll should facilitate cooperation and mutually beneficial acts within warrior groups and, thereby, greater coherence, stability and survival prospects for those warbands themselves.

Behavioural studies have shown that the perception of being observed disposes individuals to act in ways that tend toward social norms, even if the cues are subtle, and this is heightened by threats of punishment (see Gervais and Norenzayan 2012; first discussed in the context of Old Norse religion by Raffield et al. 2019; cf. Taggart 2019; 2022c, 85n.). The Valhǫll mythos implies that human action is being reliably monitored by supernatural creatures, whether Óðinn or others related to him, and that sense of watchful judgment may have further inclined warriors in the retinue towards prosocial acts like sharing and altruism as well as, for example, the maintenance of weaponry, training and support for others in conflict. Moreover, that feeling of a divine gaze is most likely to be felt in meaningful moments for warrior coalitions, such as rituals, perhaps like those of the famous dedication of an opposing army to Óðinn in the late *Styrbjarnar þáttr Svíakappa* (p. 72; cf. Tindr, *Hákonardrápa* 11; *Vǫluspá* K24; Nordberg 2022; Raffield, Price and Collard 2019, 9–10); in visual imagery on walls or armour (see *Húsdrápa* 7–11 for an Óðinnic example); or during a speech or poem in the hall or battle (recorded in

the latter context in e.g. *Gráfeldardrápa* 8, although no purported witnesses to such speeches are so specific as to detail the mythological motifs used, even if Óðinnic imagery is common in skaldic poetry). Cooperation may have been amplified at times when it was most crucial for group togetherness.

Of course, in a retinue, the prestige and social capital of members are in a heightened and constant state of negotiation both in comparison with others within the group and those outside (both real and literary-historical), which results in ongoing competitiveness within and between warrior groups (Raffield et al. 2025). While there is more to being in a warrior group than violence (as, again, is stressed in Raffield et al. 2025), membership does involve personally risky behaviours that serve both individual prestige-related goals and the wider political and economic aims of the group, in particular its leader. Valhǫll is, therefore, not the only dynamic reinforcing the status quo of cooperation and aggression.

Nevertheless, this may be a useful prism through which to look at *Eiríksmál* 9, the poem's enigmatic last stanza (for previous research, see *Eiríksmál* pp. 1003–4, 1013). Why does the text end just after telling us that it will list a series of five kings? The best explanation may still simply be that a now-lost stanza originally followed, and *Heimskringla* (pp. 72–73) does state that five kings fell along with Eiríkr in his final battle – although it then lists seven. That confusion, as well as the poem's anonymity, adaptation to a hall environment and glorification of the Valhǫll mythos, does prompt the thought that the identity of the kings was not fixed but could be customised to include the dead of the retinue or its leader. *Eiríksmál* as a whole could be based on a template that was adapted from situation to situation. *Hákonarmál* is commonly thought to have been modelled after *Eiríksmál* due to their similarities in theme, style and genre (see *Hákonarmál* pp. 171–72) – and much like *Eiríksmál* 9, *Hákonarmál* 16 finds Hákon having been preceded in Valhǫll by his brothers – so perhaps the broad strokes of this sort of memorial encomium were more widely established than the survival of only these two poems hints at. New iterations of the template could have been adapted to the details of a warrior's life and community, which are, after all, only vaguely sketched out in *Eiríksmál*.

If so, the performative element of *Eiríksmál* 9 could have had, at least, a dual impact: it would honour the deceased connected with the hall – perhaps highlighting the competition over reputation in the in-group – but it would also remind the living of the potential rewards for their membership, incorporating them and their community deeper into the Valhǫll milieu (on the performance of this text, see Gunnell 2020; Nordberg 2004). Picturing individuals in Valhǫll with whom the audience have an emotional and social connection may make the afterlife's existence more concrete and welcoming, although ultimately this aspect of the afterlife's mythology may be most effective as a coping mechanism for grief (cf. Draper, Holloway and Adamson 2014; Hodge 2011).

In either case, *Eiríksmál* 9 and *Hákonarmál* 16 hint that families, in addition to leaders' subordinates, may have expected to be together in the warrior beyond (again as paralleled in *Eyrbyggja saga* 19; though *contra* e.g. the probably also late *Helgakviða*

Hundingsbana II 43–50). While this has consequences for the presence of spouses of warrior men and women, I know of no women who are mentioned inside Óðinn's hall other than *valkyrjur* (who do have a human background in the heroic poetry).[7]

Indirect Effects

The Valhǫll mythology may have affected behaviour less overtly too. Reputation effects, for example, may have been significant, the most basic of these being that supposedly having been invited to Valhǫll would boost the renown of a dead person, as encapsulated in *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*. From the evidence of texts like *Hávamál* (e.g. stt. 5–9, 76–77), a good reputation was particularly desirable in Old Norse societies. It may have been even more so in martial spheres, in which, as mentioned above, social capital was under constant negotiation (evident throughout skaldic poetry, e.g. *Arinbjarnakviða* 10; *Glymdrápa* 9; *Vellekla* 11, 22; social death remains one of the most intimidating aspects of dying: see e.g. Hodge 2018). This reputation effect will advantage the kin and perhaps friends of the dead (benefiting, in turn, their genetics), and if someone seems destined for Valhǫll, they may receive more cooperation in life from that alone.

Valhǫll is also the basis for costly signals of commitment to the warrior group and its ideology (for an overview of this heavily researched dynamic, see Sosis 2022). These might be separated into two groups of signals: 1) those of leaders, who had to fund religious activities like feasting and ritual; who, according to the scattered references of skaldic poetry, had responsibility for the maintenance of sites of worship (e.g. *Sigurðardrápa* 6; *Ynglingatal* 11; see further Sundqvist 2016, 167–92, 305–07 and, on the morality of piety, White and Norenzayan 2022); and who may even have been viewed as intermediaries for the gods in their rulership (Taggart 2022b, 443, 447–49; forthcoming); 2) those common to the whole group of tenacity, risk-taking and bravery; of hard work and altruism; of adherence to ritual; and, depending on the individual, those expressed through more menial roles like training or physical labour. The costliest of these activities stand out: great feasts and funerals, grave goods, mounds and other constructions for practical, aesthetic and/or ideological purposes, not to mention exposure to potential injury and death. However, a range of physical, mental, social and economic costs could be paid by the leader and their retinue of varying degrees of gravity (see further Taggart 2022a).

The Valhǫll mythos implies these undertakings were understood partly as a demonstration of righteousness to Óðinn; however, they also function as displays of personal quality to others within the warrior community. They show a commitment from the leadership downwards to not only the others in the group but also their shared values and ideology, based in a common religious tradition, a commitment that, at its

[7] After my presentation at ReykjavíkurAkademían, I was asked about the place of women in Valhǫll. I do not have space to examine that query properly here, but some answers might be found in the contribution to this volume by Luke John Murphy, "Valkyries Propagating, Propagating Valkyries: A Mythological Feedback Loop."

most extreme, will result in pain or death. Those values and ideology are grounded in an afterlife that none of the group has ever seen, which incorporates extraordinary elements like the impossibly large hall, the impossible animals that surround, supply and feed on it, and the impossible women of the *valkyrjur*. By demonstrating such loyalty to these counterintuitive concepts, worshippers become more credible and trustworthy to others who value them.[8]

As such, not only would adherence to the code of conduct mandated by entry to Valhǫll have had direct behavioural consequences, but the actions associated with that belief, violent or otherwise, would also have stimulated further willingness to cooperate (on the formation of bonds within such groups more generally, see Raffield et al. 2016). Moreover, committed individuals are more vicious in defending their group and more aggressive in conflict (Stein, Hobson and Schroeder 2021, 116–17). As a result, warrior bands should be more stable and more likely to endure.

The success of the Valhǫll mythology may be to some extent self-reinforcing. Victory in conflict gave social dominance to individuals who had invested in that mythos, reinforcing the value of its complex of ideas and strengthening their coalition-building potential, in turn making further victories more likely in future (cf. Fitouchi and Singh 2022 on the desirability of such concepts as tools of elite social control). Success could even imply that the gods endorse a group's values, given perceptions that leaders were being guided by them (e.g. *Hákonarmál* 18; *Vellekla* 14, 31; *Poem about Hákon* 1) and particularly when those values were embedded within a wider culturally successful mythology and being endorsed by authorities like royalty and skalds (Milhazes-Cunha and Oliveira 2023). Costly signalling alone makes a concept like Valhǫll more credible and encourages similar demonstrations in the future.

Social Structures and Paradox

The Valhǫll mythos might have increased cooperation within a warrior band, but such groups are not flat structures. Some members are more distinguished than others, most obviously their leaders but also those in honoured positions like *stallarar* (marshals), *stýrimenn* (ships' captains) and *stafnbúar* (forecastle-people). While a group may have gained a survival advantage from the Valhǫll mythology, not all the costs and benefits were necessarily shared out equally.

According to skaldic poetry, leaders were expected in the vanguard, a position of considerable danger (e.g. *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* 12; Guthormr, *Hákonardrápa* 8; *Hákonarmál* 2; *Sigurðardrápa* 4), and they would have had other costs to pay, some religious in nature but also, for example, related to compensating subordinates or maintaining communal buildings. However, those subordinates could apparently be called on to protect their leaders regardless of cost, their lives being considered secondary (e.g. *Eiríksdrápa* 8; *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* 18; Flokkr *about Erlingr Skjálgsson* 3; Þorfinnr, *Lausavísur* 2). Kings,

[8] The mixing of Christian and non-Christian traditions may have affected the coherence of warrior groups (cf. *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* 22; Hallfreðr, *Lausavísur* 6–10), but considerations of space prevent examination of that here.

jarls and other elites would also have been as well equipped as anyone in their army, so their exposure to peril may still have been less than that of, say, their standard bearers (Raffield et al. 2025). As noted above, warriors would have had to pay further costs for the leader and group, including the undertaking of dangerous tasks like collecting tribute, travelling and taxation (Raffield et al. 2025); the least respected and junior among them may have been delegated worse tasks, although non-warriors might have been given the most menial labour (Cooijmans 2023, 157–59; McLeod 2023, 209; cf. Raffield 2022).

Despite the uneven division of costs, the profits of membership would also have been paid out unequally, in life and projected into the afterlife. The social and material resources accrued through warrior activities will benefit first the leader and then others of high status; direct comparisons between the handouts for different members of a retinue are rare in Viking Age literature, but payments varied in the court of Óláfr II Haraldsson, at least (Sigvatr, *Lausavísur* 9; *Vestrfararvísur* 5). Given that the social structure of the hall is echoed in Valhǫll, afterlife rewards must likewise have been perceived as differing.

Because greater social and financial rewards are achieved by paying costs – and because internal competition means no one can fully escape payment – more exacting demands should be acceptable to lower-ranked individuals. Moreover, attaching entrance into Valhǫll to the fate of leaders is a big incentive for warriors paying the largest costs to remain loyal to their groups and maximise their efforts to ensure their success (while pressuring leaders to fulfil their own Valhǫll-mandated criteria). For the lowest classes in an army, this may have been their only route into their desired afterlife (on social heterogeneity in warbands, see Raffield et al. 2016, 39–40; cf. de Aguiar and Cronk 2011; Fitouchi and Singh 2022).

Of course, Valhǫll provides a divine model for – or perhaps emerges from and *post hoc* justifies – the structure of the warband (see further Nordberg 2004). It validates a hierarchical community, with only Óðinn above the leader in life and in death. Warriors' signals of commitment therefore not only make the notion of Valhǫll more plausible, but also the hierarchy that underpins its ideology.

Óðinnic displeasure is also an attractive outsourcing of punishment, which could dissuade people from taking advantage of warband membership without paying its costs. Such individuals, known as free riders, discourage cooperation within a community and so make it less cohesive (Davis 2023). However, punishing can be deleterious for leaders' reputations and cause reactive aggression, feuds and reduced group stability (Atkinson and Bourrat 2011). Therefore, even powerful rulers may be reluctant to discipline; in such cases, Valhǫll becomes a means of dissuading free riding, leaving punitive action to a deity who may be watching in the crucial moments.

Finally, of course, links between the Valhǫll mythos and Ragnarǫk provide unsuccessful leaders with a pretext for failure. It is Óðinn's fault and divine plan, they can credibly say, and their misadventures necessary for warriors to discharge their sacred duty to go to Valhǫll (Taggart, forthcoming). The hierarchy of the group is fortified against difficult times. That being the case, it would be no surprise if the spread

of the Valhǫll mythos were driven by the people most actively rewarded and protected by its popularity, leaders and court poets, whose authority already makes them a compelling source for such beliefs (cf. Milhazes-Cunha and Oliveira 2023). Most sources on Valhǫll have been created by, about and/or for one of those two groups, although the corpus is so small that it is difficult to extrapolate to its transmission and acceptance in wider society.

One wrinkle is that, while beliefs in punitive deities are correlated with increased prosociality, the Valhǫll mythos actively encourages behaviours that could seem antisocial like pillaging and invasion, including against northern communities with a similar language, culture and, possibly, commitment to Valhǫll.[9] Helgi and Hákon apparently receive high status in the afterlife precisely because they are more adept in and enthusiastic about violence than others (*Hákonarmál* 16; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*). Essentially, while the Valhǫll complex may have boosted cohesion on the small scale of retinues and their communities, as well as in larger expeditionary groups, it likely discouraged cooperation beyond that, including between groups who shared elements of a collective identity.[10] Essentially, it could have been a source of political instability in the North, exacerbating the personal, cultural, economic and political factors also at work.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, combining literary sources with psychological theories to explain behaviour is problematic, especially given the fragmentary state of the extant evidence and subsequent difficulties with falsifiability. I cannot prove my case. I can only say that, in tandem with other cultural, economic and political dynamics, the mythology of Valhǫll *could*, directly and indirectly, have supported prosociality among Viking Age warriors, reinforcing the hierarchies of and giving a competitive advantage to their coalitions – even while it fostered larger-scale antisocial conduct and ultimately contributed to instability in the North.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Arinbjarnarkviða = Clunies Ross, Margaret, ed. 2022. "Egill Skallagrímsson. *Arinbjarnarkviða*." In *SkP 5*, 327–67.

Darraðarljóð = Fulk, R. D., ed. 2022. "*Darraðarljóð.*" In *SkP 5*, 1296–314.

Eiríksdrápa = Carroll, Jayne, ed. 2012. "Þórðr Kolbeinsson. *Eiríksdrápa*." In *SkP 1*, 487–513.

[9] An important caveat is that a warband's norms may not correspond with other communities': cf. e.g. the substantial discourse on the saga character of the *ójafnaðarmaðr* 'inequitable person', outlined and discussed in Shortt Butler 2016.

[10] Intergroup conflict can amplify intragroup harmony (Bowles 2008; Henrich et al. 2019), a dynamic to which the Valhǫll complex presumably adds.

Eiríksmál = Fulk, R. D., ed. 2022. "*Eiríksmál*." In *SkP 1*, 1003–13.

Erfidrápa Óláfs helga = Jesch, Judith, ed. 2012. "Sigvatr Þórðarson. *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga*." In *SkP 1*, 663–98.

Eyrbyggja saga = Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds. 1935. *Eyrbyggja saga*. Íslenzk fornrit 4. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Flokkr *about Erlingr Skjálgsson* = Jesch, Judith, ed. 2012. "Sigvatr Þórðarson. Flokkr *about Erlingr Skjálgsson*." In *SkP 1*, 629–43.

Gesta Danorum = Friis-Jensen, Karsten, ed. 2015. Saxo Grammaticus. *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, translated by Peter Fisher. 2 vols. Oxford University Press.

Glymdrápa = Marold, Edith, et al., eds. 2012. "Þorbjǫrn hornklofi. *Glymdrápa*." In *SkP 1*, 73–91.

Gráfeldardrápa = Finlay, Alison, ed. 2012. "Glúmr Geirason. *Gráfeldardrápa*." In *SkP 1*, 245–66.

Guthormr, *Hákonardrápa* = Poole, Russell, ed. 2012. "Guthormr sindri. *Hákonardrápa*." In *SkP 1*, 156–70.

Hákonarmál = Fulk, R. D., ed. 2012. "Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson. *Hákonarmál*." In *SkP 1*, 171–95.

Hallfreðr, *Lausavísur* = Whaley, Diana, ed. 2022. "Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson. *Lausavísur*." In *SkP 5*, 874–904, 906–14.

Haraldskvæði = Fulk, R. D., ed. 2012. "Þorbjǫrn hornklofi. *Haraldskvæði* (*Hrafnsmál*)." In *SkP 1*, 91–117.

Heimskringla = Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1911. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla: Nóregs konunga sǫgur*. G.E.C. Gads.

Húsdrápa = Marold, Edith, et al., eds. 2017. "Úlfr Uggason. *Húsdrápa*." In *SkP 3*, translated from German by John Foulks, 402–24.

Icelandic Rune Poem = Page, R.I., ed. 1999. *Icelandic Rune Poem.* Viking Society for Northern Research.

Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds. 2014. *Eddukvæði*. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Landnámabók = Jakob Benediktsson, ed. 1968. "*Landnámabók*." In *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, 29–525. Íslenzk fornrit 1. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Poem about Hákon = Heslop, Kate, ed. 2012. "Þorleifr jarlsskáld Rauðfeldarson. *Poem about Hákon*." In *SkP 1*, 369–72.

Ragnarsdrápa = Clunies Ross, Margaret, ed. 2017. "Bragi inn gamli Boddason. *Ragnarsdrápa*." In *SkP 3*, 27–46.

Sigurðardrápa = Marold, Edith, et al., eds. 2017. "Kormákr Ǫgmundarson. *Sigurðardrápa.*" In *SkP 3*, translated from German by John Foulks, 272–86.

Sigvatr *Lausavísur* = Fulk, R. D., ed. 2012. "Sigvatr Þórðarson. *Lausavísur*." In *SkP 1*, 698–737.

Skáldskaparmál = Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1998. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. 2 vols. Viking Society for Northern Research.

SkP 1 = Whaley, Diana, ed. 2012. *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1*. Brepols.

SkP 3 = Gade, Kari Ellen, and Edith Marold, eds. 2017. *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3*. Brepols.

SkP 5 = Clunies Ross, Margaret, Kari Ellen Gade and Tarrin Wills, eds. 2022. *Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 5*. Brepols.

Styrbjarnar þáttr Svíakappa = Guðbrandur Vigfússon, ed. 1860–68. *Styrbjarnar þáttr Svíakappa*. In *Flateyjarbók: En samling af norske konge-saegar* [Flateyjarbók: A collection of Norse kings' sagas], 70–73. Vol. 2. 3 vols. Malling.

Tindr, *Hákonardrápa* = Poole, Russell, ed. 2012. "Tindr Hallkelsson. *Hákonardrápa*." In *SkP 1*, 336–58.

Vellekla = Marold, Edith, et al., eds. 2012. "Einarr skálaglamm Helgason. *Vellekla*." In *SkP 1*, translated from German by John Foulks, 280–329.

Vestrfararvísur = Jesch, Judith, ed. 2012. "Sigvatr Þórðarson. *Vestrfararvísur*." In *SkP 1*, 615–27.

Ynglingatal = Marold, Edith, et al., eds. 2012. "Þjóðólfr ór Hvini. *Ynglingatal*." In *SkP 1*, translated from German by John Foulks, 3–60.

Þorfinnr, *Lausavísur* = Whaley, Diana, ed. 2012. "Þorfinnr munnr. *Lausavísur*." In *SkP 1*, 845–48.

Secondary Sources

de Aguiar, Rolando, and Lee Cronk. 2011. "Stratification and Supernatural Punishment: Cooperation or Obedience?" *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 1: 73–75.

Alcorta, Candace, and Richard Sosis. 2022. *Evolutionary Perspectives on Religion and Violence*. Cambridge University Press.

Ásdís Egilsdóttir. 2005. "Kolbítur verður karlmaður" [Kolbítur becomes a man]. In *Miðaldabörn* [Children of the Middle Ages], edited by Ármann Jakobsson and Torfi Tulinius, 87–100. Hugvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Atherton, Emma. 2021. "Moralizing Hunger: Cultural Fatphobia and the Moral Language of Contemporary Diet Culture." *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 7: 1–36.

Atkinson, Quentin, and Pierrick Bourrat. 2011. "Beliefs about God, the Afterlife and Morality Support the Role of Supernatural Policing in Human Cooperation." *Evolution and Human Behavior* 32: 41–49.

Bowles, Samuel. 2008. "Being Human: Conflict; Altruism's Midwife." *Nature* 456: 326–27.

Cohen, Chen, and Moshe Schwartz. 2013. "Minimizing Shirking in Auctions and Tournaments." *Theoretical Economics Letters* 3: 197–201.

Cooijmans, Christian. 2023. "Hostile in Tent: Reconsidering the Roles of Viking Encampment across the Frankish Realm." In *Viking Camps: Case Studies and Comparisons*, edited by Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson and Irene García Losquiño, 147–67. Routledge.

Coşgel, Metin, and Thomas Miceli. 2018. "The Price of Redemption: Sin, Penance, and Marginal Deterrence." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 156: 206–18.

Davis, Taylor. 2023. "Cultural Group Selection and the Evolution of Religion." In *Routledge Handbook of Evolutionary Approaches to Religion*, edited by Yair Lior and Justin Lane, 196–208. Routledge.

Draper, Peter, Margaret Holloway and Susan Adamson. 2014. "A Qualitative Study of Recently Bereaved People's Beliefs about Death: Implications for Bereavement Care." *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 23: 1300–8.

Dutton, Douglas. 2015. "An Encapsulation of Óðinn: Religious Belief and Ritual Practice Among the Viking Age Elite with Particular Focus Upon the Practice of Ritual Hanging 500–1050 AD." Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen.

Fitouchi, Léo, and Manvir Singh. 2022. "Supernatural Punishment Beliefs as Cognitively Compelling Tools of Social Control." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 44: 252–57.

Gert, Bernard, and Joshua Gert. 2016. "The Definition of Morality." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition)*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/morality-definition/.

Gervais, Will M., and Ara Norenzayan. 2012. "Like a Camera in the Sky? Thinking about God Increases Public Self-Awareness and Socially Desirable Responding." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48: 298–302.

Graeff, Peter, and Gert Tinggaard Svendsen. 2020. "Religion, Crime, and Social Trust in Historic Germany: Are Catholics More Inclined to Violate Social Norms than Protestants?" *Journal of Historical Sociology* 33: 505–18.

Gunnell, Terry. 2013. "From One High One to Another: The Acceptance of Óðinn as Preparation for God." In *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Leszek Słupecki and Rudolf Simek, 153–78. Fassbaender.

———. 2020. "Performance Archaeology, *Eiríksmál*, *Hákonarmál* and the Study of Old Nordic Religions." In *John Miles Foley's World of Oralities: Text, Tradition, and Contemporary Oral Theory*, edited by Mark C. Amodio, 137–53. ARC Humanities Press.

Henrich, Joseph, Michal Bauer, Alessandra Cassar, Julie Chytilová and Benjamin Grant Purzycki. 2019. "War Increases Religiosity." *Nature Human Behaviour* 3: 129, DOI: 10.1038/s41562-018-0512-3.

Hodge, K. Mitch. 2011. "On Imagining the Afterlife." *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 11: 367–89.

———. 2018. "Dead-Survivors, the Living Dead, and Concepts of Death." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 9: 539–65.

Hultgård, Anders. 1994. "*Ragnarǫk* and Valhalla: Eschatological Beliefs among the Scandinavians of the Viking Period." In *The Twelfth Viking Congress: Developments around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Age*, edited by Björn Ambrosiani and Helen Clarke, 288–93. Riksantikvarieämbetet.

———. 2011. "Óðinn, *Valhǫll* and the *Einherjar*: Eschatological Myth and Ideology in the Late Viking Period." In *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes*, edited by Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal and Ian Beuermann, 297–329. Brill.

Kupor, Daniella M., Kristin Laurin and Jonathan Levav. 2015. "Anticipating Divine Protection? Reminders of God Can Increase Nonmoral Risk Taking." *Psychological Science* 26: 374–83.

Lang, Martin, Benjamin Grant Purzycki, Coren Apicella et al. 2019. "Moralizing Gods, Impartiality and Religious Parochialism across 15 Societies." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 286: 28620190202, DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2019.0202.

McLeod, Shane. 2023. "Between the Winter Camps: Logistics of the Viking Great Army." In *Viking Camps: Case Studies and Comparisons*, edited by Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson and Irene García Losquiño, 206–21. Routledge.

Milhazes-Cunha, Joana, and Luciana Oliveira. 2023. "Doctors for the Truth: Echo Chambers of Disinformation, Hate Speech, and Authority Bias on Social Media." *Societies* 13: 226, DOI: 10.3390/soc13100226.

Nordberg, Andreas. 2004. "Krigarna i Odins sal: Dödsföreställningar och krigarkult i fornnordisk religion [The warriors in Óðinn's hall: Death concepts and warrior cult in Old Norse religion]." Doctoral thesis, Stockholms universitet.

———. 2022. "What did King Hákon *góði* do before the Battle at Fitjar and after the Battle at Avaldsnes?" *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74: 119–38.

Nygaard, Simon. 2019. "Being Óðinn Bursson." In *Social Norms in Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Jakub Morawiec, Aleksandra Jochymek and Grzegorz Bartusik, 51–74. ARC Humanities Press.

Oehrl, Sigmund. 2017. "Documenting and Interpreting the Picture Stones of Gotland: Old Problems and New Approaches." *Current Swedish Archaeology* 25: 87–122.

Purzycki, Benjamin Grant, Coren Apicella, Quentin D. Atkinson, Emma Cohen, Rita Anne McNamara, Aiyana K. Willard, Dimitris Xygalatas, Ara Norenzayan and Joseph Henrich. 2016. "Moralistic Gods, Supernatural Punishment and the Expansion of Human Sociality." *Nature* 530: 327–30, DOI: 10.1038/nature16980.

Raffield, Ben. 2022. "Bound in Captivity: Intersections of Viking Raiding, Slaving, and Settlement in Western Europe during the Ninth Century CE." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47: 414–37.

Raffield, Ben, Sophie Bonding, Marianne Moen, Christian Cooijmans and Declan Taggart. 2025. "The Institution of the Warrior: Tracing Martial Networks and Organisation in Viking-Age Scandinavia." *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 78: 101661, DOI: 10.1016/j.jaa.2025.101661.

Raffield, Ben, Claire Greenlow, Neil Price and Mark Collard. 2016. "Ingroup Identification, Identity Fusion and the Formation of Viking War Bands." *World Archaeology* 48: 35–50.

Raffield, Ben, Neil Price and Mark Collard. 2019. "Religious Belief and Cooperation: A View from Viking-Age Scandinavia." *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 9: 2–22.

Sapp, Christopher D. 2022. *Dating the Old Norse* Poetic Edda. John Benjamins.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2009. "Diversity and Its Consequences for the Study of Old Norse Religion: What Is It We Are Trying to Reconstruct?" In *Between Paganism and Christianity in the North*, edited by Leszek Słupecki and Jakub Morawiec, 9–22. Wydawnictwo Universytetu Rzeszowskiego.

Shariff, Azim F., and Ara Norenzayan. 2011. "Mean Gods Make Good People: Different Views of God Predict Cheating Behavior." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 21: 85–96.

Shariff, Azim F., and Mijke Rhemtulla. 2012. "Divergent Effects of Beliefs in Heaven and Hell on National Crime Rates." *PLOS ONE* 7: e39048, DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0039048.

Shortt Butler, Joanne. 2016. "Narrative Structure and the Individual in the *Íslendingasögur*: Motivation, Provocation and Characterisation." Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge.

Sosis, Richard. 2022. "Costly Signaling: The ABCs of Signaling Theory and Religion." In *The Routledge Handbook of Evolutionary Approaches to Religion*, edited by Yair Lior and Justin Lane, 209–26. Routledge.

Stein, Daniel H., Nicholas M. Hobson and Juliana Schroeder. 2021. "A Sacred Commitment: How Rituals Promote Group Survival." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 40: 114–20.

Sundqvist, Olof. 2016. *An Arena for Higher Powers: Ceremonial Buildings and Religious Strategies for Rulership in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. Brill.

Taggart, Declan. 2019. "Do Thor and Odin Have Bodies? Superperception and Divine Intervention among the Old Norse Gods." *Religions* 10: 468, DOI: 10.3390/rel10080468.

———. 2021. "Did a Little Birdie Really Tell Odin? Applying Theory of Mind to Old Norse Religion." *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 21: 280–308.

———. 2022a. "Bonding over a Death: Signalling in the Funeral Episode of Ibn Fadlan's *Risala*." *Early Medieval Europe* 30: 437–60.

———. 2022b. "Religion in the Viking Age Moral Economy: A Reading of a *Lausavísa* by Egill Skallagrímsson." *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74: 433–58.

———. 2022c. "The Early Icelandic Moral Economy According to the Major Poems of Egill Skallagrímsson." *JEGP* 121: 295–320.

———. 2024. "What Do the *Nornir* Care? Fate, Morality and Supernatural Punishment in the *Poetic Edda*." *Saga Book* 48: 79–84.

———. Forthcoming. "Human Morality and Old Norse Gods." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*.

Turiel, Elliot. 2015. "Morality and Prosocial Judgments." In *The Oxford Handbook of Prosocial Behavior*, edited by David A. Schroeder and William G. Graziano, 137–52. Oxford University Press.

White, Cindel J. M., Chloe M. Dean and Kristin Laurin. 2024. "Do Reminders of God Increase Willingness to Take Risks?" *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 110: 104539, DOI: 10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104539.

White, Cindel J. M., and Ara Norenzayan. 2019. "Belief in Karma: How Cultural Evolution, Cognition, and Motivations Shape Belief in Supernatural Justice." In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, edited by James M. Olson, 60: 1–63. Elsevier Academic Press.

———. 2022. "Karma and God: Convergent and Divergent Mental Representations of Supernatural Norm Enforcement." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 14: 70–85, DOI: 10.1037/rel0000436.

Willard, Aiyana K., Adam Baimel, Hugh Turpin, Jonathan Jong and Harvey Whitehouse. 2020. "Rewarding the Good and Punishing the Bad: The Role of Karma and Afterlife Beliefs in Shaping Moral Norms." *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 41: 385–96.

Yilmaz, Onurcan, and Hasan G. Bahçekapili. 2016. "Supernatural and Secular Monitors Promote Human Cooperation Only If They Remind of Punishment." *Evolution and Human Behavior* 37: 79–84.

TECHNOLOGY IN OLD NORSE MYTH: THE CASE OF *SNORRA EDDA*

Jens Eike Schnall*

"Broadly speaking, technology is the way people do things. […] Yet it is startling to reflect that we have, as a rule, only the vaguest notion of how the men of the Middle Ages actually did things, and how, from time to time, they learned to do them better," the American historian Lynn White remarked in 1940 (White 1940, 141; on the impact of his research cf. Roland 2003). Much has changed since he wrote the above lines, both in the premises, approaches and attitudes of researchers and the insights gained over the last century from research on the field of medieval technology, not least through archaeology and partly thanks to new or improved scientific methods. The history of medieval technology has since been dealt with in numerous books and studies, e.g. White 1962; Ludwig and Schmidtchen 1992; Gies and Gies 1994; Lindgren [4]2001; McClellan and Dorn [2]2006; Deming 2010; Bayerl 2013; and Popplow [2]2020.

Since technology is an integral part of the human identity and condition, how is it reflected upon in premodern Scandinavia? In classical myth from the Mediterranean, the role of inventions and technological advancement is prominent—the titan Prometheus and gods such as Athena, Demeter, Hermes or Hephaistos are shown as inventors and masterminds behind human technological advancement (cf. e.g. Hägermann and Schneider 1997; Junker and Strohwald 2012). The issue of origins was excessively dealt with among the Greeks (cf. Baumbach 2006; Farioli 2010, 195) and entered a philosophical tradition that became an integral part of Western Medieval thought. It can be observed in the form of the strong interest in the *protos heuretes*, the first inventor or discoverer of an art or technique, to be included in and referred to by standard encyclopaedic works of the Middle Ages.

In Old Norse mythology, technology appears in various forms and throughout the corpus of Eddic and Skaldic poetry, as well as in *Snorra Edda*. Like its counterparts from Antiquity, Old Norse mythology is partly about technological innovation—the

* University of Bergen.

invention of tools, advanced metallurgy, the invention of the fishing net etc.—and has a number of tales which reflect technology. Yet the focus of studies is often on the dwarfs and the ingenious Vǫlundr as master smiths (cf. e.g. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 2004 on smiths and smithing; Ruggerini 2006 on mythical flying devices; von See et al., 1997–2019, III:82–92 on *Vǫlundarkviða*; Barndon 2006 on the identity of smiths; Hedeager 2011, esp. 148–61 on metalwork at Ásgarðr and central places such as Gudme/Funen; Zachrisson 2017 on Vǫlundr in the Uppåkra context). Technology is frequently manifest in manufactured objects and unique precious items such as the attributes of gods made by dwarfs (e.g. Þórr's hammer Mjǫllnir, Óðinn's spear Gungnir, Freyja's necklace Brísingamen), which play major roles in the Eddic poems. As core elements of culture, technologies such as agriculture, hunting, fishing, milling, cooking, brewing, weaving, forging, shipbuilding and warfare, and language technologies such as poetry, runic lore and magic, are omnipresent.

This article asks about the relation of the theme of technology in Old Norse myth to medieval learning and how it relates to standard contexts of conceptualisation of technology in medieval Latin and contemporary Old Norse sources. More specifically, it asks how technology and technological thought are represented and dealt with in *Snorra Edda*: Where and how does technology become the centre of a myth *in Snorra Edda*? The examples chosen for the discussion will mainly be stanzas 7 and 8 in *Vǫluspá* (the gods as technicians and the Golden Age), their rendering in *Snorra Edda* and the invention of the fishing net.

vél, íþrótt, kunnasta—Technical Intelligence, Arts and Devices

The attitude towards crafts and technologies in learned writings has been "ambivalent, but on balance positive" from the time of the church fathers to the Middle Ages; partly positive due to the usefulness of arts and crafts, partly negative due to the inherited "long tradition of disdain for what Aristotle called the 'banausic,' or utilitarian arts, […] that 'degrade the mind'" (Gies and Gies 1994, 3–14, quotations 10, 14). One highly influential work, the *Elucidarium* of Honorius Augustodunensis (c1098–1102) shows some scepticism when addressing the question of how much hope there is for a number of social estates and professions to get to heaven—for the craftsmen, there is but little (which admittedly also applies for other estates or groups). The work was known in Iceland already in the twelfth century and is among the early translations of Latin works into Icelandic. The oldest manuscript AM 474a 4to (c1220) has a lacuna where the craftsmen are addressed, but the second oldest, the *Hauksbók*-version AM 475 4to (c1300) provides an Old Norse translation of that section: *‹Discipvlvs› Hvat røðer þv vm smiði alzkvns ‹Magister› Fleiri firir dømaz en hialpaz þvi at þeir svikia miok i velvm sinvm* (Eluc., 109).[1] The *Elucidarius* involves crafts and technical devices in metaphors conveying positive and negative meanings. In a positive context, the craft of carpentry is used as an example of how the whole of creation was ready in God's mind before the creative

[1] "Disciple: What do you say about all the kinds of craftsmen? Master: More of them are damned than saved because they deceive much in their crafts."

act: […] *Sua sem smiþr sa es hus vill gera litʀ fyrst huerso hann vill hvatke gera. oc riss su smiþ siþan í verke es fyʀ stoþ smiþoþ íhuguite smiþsens* (Eluc., 117–18).[2] The point of this example is clear: The building is crafted and erected twice, first immaterially as a construction plan in the mind of the craftsman, and then in the material world when the house is built according to that plan. Crafts and technologies provide collective symbols and images of knowledge. The idea that the creation of a building goes back to a work conceived in the mind is so familiar to medieval authors that it can be used to illustrate problems outside the building trade (Binding and Burdich 2002, 86).

Applied in a negative context, a craftsman's work can also be done by a servant—God has forced the devil to serve him as "an industrious smith in the world" because of his rebellion in heaven: *Þessar smiðs aflar ero qvalar heims Smið bælgir hans ablastar fræstni hamrar hans ok tænggr ero ofriðar menn ok qveliaðrar þrælar* [sic] *hans ok sagðer* [sic] *ero bolvenðr ok bakmalogar tvngvr* etc. (Eluc., 93).[3]

Neither the Latin *Elucidarius* nor its Old Norse translation specify in which way craftsmen would deceive (*svíkja*) people, be it that their works would not live up to expectations, e.g. being made of poorer quality and cheaper materials than agreed, or that the price asked for them was too high. In the Old Norse text, the Latin *quidquid faciunt* ('whatever they do/produce') is rendered as *í vélum sínum* ('in their arts') (cf. Eluc., 109). While the Latin expression is neutral and descriptive, the Old Norse word *vél* (f.) is a highly ambiguous term. It has a spectre of meanings from intellectual qualities ('cunning, trick, deceit, deception') to physical tools ('device, machine'), developed by technological intelligence. It is also well attested in the Skaldic corpus.[4] Cunning and ingenuity are ambivalent: Instances where *vél* is used in the sense of 'deceit, trick' including technical solutions and mechanical devices are frequent, but there is an ambivalence to them depending on the context and the involved characters. As such, *vél* participates in the common notion of 'art' and 'ingenuity' as a double-edged sword, cf. Latin *ars*, Greek *téchnē* and *mḗtis* or Middle High German *kunst* and *list*, 'art, skill, cunning of hand.' *Íþrótt* (f.) also appears as a translation of Latin *ars* in Old Norse texts, but *vél* is different in that it also covers a mechanical notion leading to its use in the sense of 'device, machine,' cf. e.g. *Pamfíluss saga*'s catalogue of forms of cunning and technological devices with *vél* translating *ars* (*Pamfíluss saga* DG 4–7 [c1270] 3ra–5vb).[5]

In the description of Loki in *Snorra Edda* (R), his most prominent feature is, apart from being beautiful in appearance and evil in character, his cunning intelligence: *Hann hafði þá speki um fram aðra menn er slægð heitir, ok vælar til allra hluta* (Gylf., 26–27),[6] and he often gets the *Æsir* in difficulties only to rectify the situation with trickery (*með vælræðum*).

[2] "[…] in the same way as the craftsman who wants to build a house first considers how he wants to build each thing, and then the very construction that before stood constructed in the craftsman's mind rises in the actual work."

[3] "The forges of this smith are the world's torments, his bellows inspirations of temptation, his hammers and tongs are enemies and tormentors, his files and saws are swearers and backbiting tongues."

[4] Cf. e.g. https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/m.php?p=onwwordch&i=22.

[5] Cf. https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o85448.

[6] "'He possessed to a greater degree than others the kind of learning that is called cunning, and tricks for every purpose'" (Faulkes 1995, 26).

Snorra Edda thus defines Loki with almost the same terms as *Klements saga*, preserved in a manuscript from around 1220 (AM 645 4to, cf. ONP and handrit.is), the time when *Snorra Edda* was probably originally written: *Lastar hann loca meþ sløgþ sina. oc vęlar. oc callar hann oc illan* (*Clem*, 67).[7] This again resembles closely what the *Elucidarium* has to say about the demons (in ON: *djǫflar*): *Et quanto illorum natura est subtilior hominum, tanto in omnibus artibus peritiores sunt quam ullus hominum*, in Old Norse: *sua sem þeira oþle es gløgsẏnna an manna. sua ero þeir oc slogre í ollom velom an men* (Eluc., 36).[8]

If technology, as Lynn White put it, is all in all "the way people do things" (see above), the technological expertise of Óðinn is, to a considerable extent, related to his role of doing things with words. In the form he appears in the *Eddas*, his permanent striving for knowledge includes the acquisition of language technology in a wider sense, such as poetry, writing, and magic. In the context of myths of origin, he is a collector of information and a 'master finder' who has his unparalleled lookout post in Ásgarðr, informants in the form of his ravens, and who is constantly on the move himself to gather knowledge and acquire technologies connected to language, writing, and magic.

It is significant that Óðinn shares a set of qualities with Loki, who according to *Lokasenna* is his sworn blood brother (cf. Ls. 9) from the past. Both are shapeshifters, both engage in genderwise dubious activities connected to the female sphere (cf. Ls. 23–24), and, most importantly in the context of this article, they are specialists when it comes to *vélir* (cf. Wanner 2009, 214–20). Wanner views their connection through the lens of the myth of Zeus and Metis, cunning personified. While Zeus swallows Metis, Óðinn's intake of Loki stops at their blood brotherhood. In both cases, this serves as a way for the god "to incorporate the power of cunning intelligence and thereby eternalize his sovereignty" (cf. Wanner 2009, 225–35, quote 232).

In the elaborate account of Óðinn's theft of the poetic mead, the god under his incognito name Bǫlverkr suggests to the giant Baugi, Suttungr's brother, the use of *vélar* in order to get to the mead, and produces the drill Rati: *Þá mælir Bǫlverkr til Bauga at þeir skyldu freista véla nokkvorra, ef þeir megi ná miðinum, en Baugi lætr þat vel vera. Þá dregr Bǫlverkr fram nafar þann er Rati heitir ok mælir at Baugi skal bora bjargit ef nafarrinn bítr* (Skskm., 4).[9] The cunning and applied technology from the mythic narrative is mirrored in Óðinn's crafty incognito name. Thus, Óðinn and Loki are both identified as 'manufacturers of misfortune:' Óðinn by himself (*Bǫlverkr*), Loki in form of a kenning (*bǫlva smiðr*, cf. Skskm., 20).

[7] "He speaks badly about Loki with his cunning and his tricks and calls him also vile."

[8] "Their nature is such that they are more sharp-witted than men and they are also more cunning in all crafts than men" (*Elucidarius*, 13).

[9] [Bragi:] "'Then Bolverk told Baugi that they would have to try some stratagems to see if they could get hold of the mead, and Baugi said that was a good idea. Then Bolverk got out an auger called Rati and instructed Baugi to bore a hole in the mountain, if the auger would cut'" (Faulkes 1995, 63).

The Invention of Tools and Technologies in *Vǫluspá*

According to *Vǫluspá*, the invention of tools and metalwork is among the very first actions of the gods, as is told already in stanza 7 of the poem:

> Hittoz æsir / á Íðavelli, /
> þeir er hǫrg ok hof / hátimbroðo; /
> afla lǫgðo, / auð smíðoðo, /
> tangir skópo / ok tól gørðo.
> (Vsp. 7)[10]

The position of the tools in this stanza has been characterised as a *hysteron proteron*, as one might infer that tools are needed to produce the smithy, the furnace etc. and thus will have been the first in a row of things made (cf. von See et al. 2019, 1:I, 118). Yet the exact meaning of this stanza is far from clear. One could even discuss whether the list of activities should be understood as a timeline—from woodwork to metalwork—at all, and whether the timeline, in this case, should include the temple and sanctuary mentioned by the previous verses of the stanza, as the building of these also requires tools. The notion of craftsmanship and application of tools is clearly conveyed by the verb *hátimbroðo*, as *timbra* is a technical carpentry term, derived from the sb. *timbr* ('lumber'), and evokes the image of trees cut down and the wooden material shaped, set up and connected at least by using an axe and a hammer, and joining elements such as pegs or nails. Still, one could also rationalise the late appearance of tools in the enumeration by assuming a shift from non-metallic tools to tools of metal, the first used for woodwork and the latter for metalwork; *tól* in the last line would then denote 'other metal tools.' Yet nothing is told about the tools that were used when building the wooden *hǫrg* and *hof*, and stone as a material for tools is not mentioned either. Thus, Vsp. 7 in R could be interpreted as relating the very first creation of tools in general, the first creation of *metal* tools and the origin of the craft of metal-working, or a scene of a vibrant construction site with wood- and metalwork going on simultaneously.

As for the latter, the smithing of e.g. nails and tools will have been a common sight on construction sites in the Viking Age and Medieval North. Independently of the actual age of the stanza or the myth, when the construction of high and most splendid heathen temples and metallurgy and the making of tools are brought together in Vsp. 7, the primary frame of comparison and understanding for authors and audiences of the thirteenth century would probably be the work on the large cathedrals and churches of the Middle Ages. This was led and carried out by organisers and experienced master craftsmen, as well as masons, stonemasons, sculptors, carpenters, painters, iron smiths and casters, goldsmiths and many other craftsmen, brought together from far away (cf. Binding 2014; he refers to the locus classicus, a report given by abbot Suger of Saint-

[10] "The Æsir met on Idavoll Plain, / high they built altars and temples; / they set up their forges, smithed precious things, / shaped tongs and made tools" (Larrington 2014, 4). The ON *hǫrg ok hof* is formulaic and uses sg. forms.

Denis, cf. also the *Vulgate* 1 Chronicles 22).[11] In addition, the crafts and tools addressed in Vsp. 7 belong to the *ars mechanica* of *armatura* within the encyclopedic tradition of the Middle Ages (cf. Gies and Gies 1994, 12). It is, in other words, by no means a strange combination one meets in this stanza; the challenge is mostly one of an assumed timeline.

Hauksbók has a different version of this stanza; instead of the line about the sanctuaries and temples (*þeir er hǫrg ok hof* / *hátimbroðo*), the text reads *afls kostuðu,* / *allz freistuðu*,[12] meaning that in *Hauksbók*, the early days of the gods are described as a time of testing and practising (von See et al. 2019, 1:II, 1501). While some of the above-mentioned aspects are lost, a new element of practical trial is thereby added to the technological topic.

The parallel use of the four verbs *leggja*, *smíða*, *skapa* and *gera* could be perceived as mere poetic variation (e.g. van Nahl 2013, 123). In any case, the emphasis is on the gods' making all these things, and this stanza seems most likely to warrant an understanding of both the making of tools and the start of metalwork as creative acts. It is therefore likely meant to be about the origin of crafts and explains the abundance of gold in the following stanza. Yet the picture of the industrious activity on Idavǫllr does suggest *simultaneous* work on wood and metal and not a transition from a 'Stone Age' to an age of metal, as no temporal adverbial highlights an order of their activities. Rather, the 'Golden Age' in Vsp. is portrayed as an age of abundance, beauty and happiness among the gods, as is told in Vsp. 8: *Teflðo í túni,* / *teitir vóro,* / *var þeim vettergis* / *vant ór gulli,* / *unz þriár kvómo* / *þursa meyiar,* / *ámátkar miǫk,* / *ór iǫtunheimom*.[13] After the creation and ordering of nature, the invention of technologies and the establishment of material culture (cf. von See et al. 2019, 1:I, 115), Vsp. 8 continues this line of thought and shows us the results of the inventions, specifically of metalwork – until this state of peace and joy is disrupted by the arrival of women. It is not clear how exactly the arrival of the three giantesses ends the 'Golden Age' (cf. ibid., 124–27, cf. also Teichert 2013, 133–34). In relation to technology, it can be observed that the gods now have created the basis for a life which prefigures that of nobles or kings as shown with the couple Father and Mother in *Rígsþula:* They do not work but use their time to play, they are happy and enjoy their rich material culture.[14] The myth of the Golden Age under King Fróði and the wondrous mill Grotti in *Snorra Edda* might suggest a certain parallel, namely that the three giantesses in Vsp. 8 interact with technology and/or that they stir feelings and wishes just as the giantesses Fenja and Menja do in the Grotti-myth, be it insatiable greed for ever more gold or some other craving such as sexual attraction, putting things out of balance (cf. ibid. 126–27). When the earth rises out of the ocean a second time after Ragnarǫk, the golden chequers are found again and the fields grow without sowing, the

[11] https://mprl-series.mpg.de/studies/5/3/index.html#9.

[12] "[T]hey tried their strength, they tested everything" (Larrington 2014, 275).

[13] "They played chequers in the meadow, they were merry, / they did not lack for gold at all, / until three ogre-girls came, / all-powerful women, out of Giant-land" (Larrington 2014, 5).

[14] For the quirks of chronology in ON myth see e.g. Lindow 2001, 40–45, 206–07.

image of Golden Age leisure is taken up again, a striking contrast to that of high-tech industriousness in Vsp. 7.

translatio studii et imperii in *Snorra Edda*

While Vsp. 7–8 thus most likely tells a myth of the creation of technologies and material culture, this is certainly not the case in Snorri's rendering. Within the logic of his euhemeristic concept, the *Æsir* already had superior knowledge, technologies and advanced skills back in Troy and introduced these to the North (cf. e.g. Walther 2015, esp. ch. 4). *Snorra Edda* presents this *translatio studii et imperii* to Sweden as technology transfer in form of a clear copy-paste procedure, with Troy as the model and the *Æsir*'s new seat in Sigtuna as a copy. Gold and riches are considerably more spatialised in *Snorra Edda*, they characterise Asia, which is in every aspect superior to other parts of the world. As the land, so the people, according to the prologue: *svá sem þar er jǫrðin fegri ok betri at ǫllum kostum en í ǫðrum stǫðum, svá var ok mannfólkit þar mest tignat af ǫllum giptum, spekinni ok aflinu, fegrðinni ok alls kostar kunnustu* (Prol., 4).[15] The prologue introduces Troy as *hús ok herbergi* in the middle of the world, much larger than any other and made with utmost diligence and splendour. The administrative subdivision of the realm into twelve kingdoms is subsequently mirrored in the description of Ásgarðr/Sigtuna at the end of the prologue. There, the parallel is highlighted by a comment on the transfer of social technology—the juridical and governmental systems—from Troy to Óðinn's realm, his new capitol Sigtuna and the northern lands under his rule: *Skipaði hann þar hǫfðingjum ok í þá líking sem verit hafði í Troja, setti tólf hǫfuðmenn í staðinum at dœma landslǫg, ok svá skipaði hann réttum ǫllum sem fyrr hǫfðu verit í Troju ok Tyrkir váru vanir* (Prol., 6).[16] This is taken up again in *Gylfaginning*. Hár mentions the Old Ásgarðr, built by the sons of Bor in the middle of the world, which the *Æsir* would call Troy (Gylf., 13), and he tells about what happened afterwards:

> 'Í upphafi setti hann stjórnarmenn ok beiddi þá at dœma með sér ørlǫg manna ok ráða um skipun borgarinnar. Þat var þar sem heitir Iðavǫllr í miðri borginni. Var þat hit fyrsta þeira verk at gera hof þat er sæti þeira standa í, tólf ǫnnur en hasætit þat er Alfǫðr á. Þat hús er bezt gert á jǫrðu ok mest. Allt er þat útan ok innan svá sem gull eitt. [...] Annan sal gerðu þeir, þat var hǫrgr er gyðjurnar áttu, ok var hann allfagr. [...] Þar næst gerðu þeir þat at þeir lǫgðu afla ok þar til gerðu þeir hamar ok tǫng ok steðja ok þaðan af ǫll tól ǫnnur. Ok því næst smíðuðu þeir málm ok stein ok tré, ok svá gnógliga þann málm er gull heitir at ǫll búsgǫgn ok oļl reiðigǫgn hǫfðu þeir af gulli, ok er sú ǫld kǫlluð gullaldr, áðr en spiltisk af tilkvámu kvennanna. Þær kómu ór Jǫtunheimum.' (Gylf., 15)[17]

[15] "[J]ust as the earth there is more beautiful and better in all respects than in other places, so too mankind there was most honoured with all blessings, wisdom and strength, beauty and every kind of skill" (Faulkes 1995, 2).

[16] "He also organized rulers there on the same pattern as had been in Troy, set up twelve chiefs in the place to administer the laws of the land, and he established all the legal system as it had previously been in Troy, and to which the Turks were accustomed" (Faulkes 1995, 4).

[17] "'In the beginning he established rulers and bade them decide with him the destinies of men and be in charge of the government of the city. This was in the place called Idavoll in the centre of the city. It

The *Uppsala Edda* version has a few different wordings, but otherwise agrees with R. As for technical details, the only difference is that in U, the gods build (vb. *smíða*) *a house* and place *one* forge in it, and the tools are *crafted*/*smithed* (*smíða*), while in R, they are *made* (vb. *gera*).

R and U are mostly identical in the elements that are added or changed in relation to *Vǫluspá*. *Snorra Edda* is indeed interested in establishing and highlighting a timeline, which is achieved by the consistent use of temporal and consecutional markers (*Í upphafi — hit fyrsta —Þar næst —(þar til) — þaðan af — því næst — svá gnógliga … at — áðr*). Building the temple (*hof*)—rather their court at the capitol—is explicitly tagged as their first work on Iðavǫllr (*hit fyrsta þeira verk*), thus emphasising the shift from social technologies (the foundation of the political, judicial and administrative systems) to engineering and crafts in the proper sense. At the same time, it is the first of several superior works in a row and, spatially, the first in the North—but not the first ever. *Snorra Edda* gives a fuller and more logical account of the new tools used for smithing by adding the tool *par excellence*, the hammer, and the anvil (*hamarr — steðja*). Further, *Snorra Edda* adds stone to the materials that the gods now worked on and enumerates them (*smíðuðu þeir málm ok stein ok tré*). Stone could have been added either for a more systematic approach or to mirror the knowledge of large medieval stone buildings such as churches (or both). Finally, there is a short, but concise reasoning that explains the characterisation of the now-following Golden Age (*gullaldr*).

While *gullaldr* is a *hapax legomenon*, the Golden Age is not "as a concept and idea a foreign body" in Snorri's mythographic narrative, as Matthias Teichert sees it, who also suggests a categorisation as a combined Silver and Golden Age on the basis of a comparison with Ovid (cf. Teichert 2013, 132, 141, 146). Rather, the Golden Age is *verbatim* an age of gold. The technological twist in *Snorra Edda* merges the abundance of gold in Asia, the metallurgy and gold in Vsp. 7–8, the euhemeristic model as such, and the idea of cultural and technology transfer from Troy. Metalwork, namely the mastery of smelting gold, forms the very beginning of *Trójumanna saga* (TrójHb., 1), where Saturnus, alias Freyr and not a wealthy man in the first part of his life, learns the technology of smelting gold from Jews and introduces it to Crete, where he becomes immensely rich, is made king and issues golden coins. As a spatial counterpart to the temporal *gullaldr*, his realm is called *gullheimr*. Thus, in Snorri's concept, the idea of Trojan origin and the idea of the Golden Age are two sides of the same *aureus*, and Troy works as a reference to it.

was their first act to build the temple that their thrones stand in, twelve in addition to the throne that belongs to All-father. This building is the best that is built on earth and the biggest. Outside and inside it seems like nothing but gold. […] They built another hall, this was the sanctuary that belonged to the goddesses, and it was very beautiful. […] The next thing they did was lay forges and [*further] they made hammer and tongs and anvil, and with these they made all other tools. After that they worked metal and stone and wood, using so copiously the metal known as gold that they had all their furniture and utensils of gold, and that age is known as the golden age, until it was spoiled by the arrival of the women. They came from Giantland'" (Faulkes 1995, 16).

Invention and Trial: Loki and the Fishing Net

In the aetiological myth about the invention of the fishing net, we get a complex story about the process of invention and discovery with several gods involved in the process.

> Þá hugsaði hann fyrir sér hverja væl Æsir mundu til finna at taka hann í forsinum. En er hann sat í húsinu tók hann língarn ok reið á ræxna svá sem net er síðan. En eldr brann fyrir honum. Þá sá hann at Æsir áttu skamt til hans ok hafði Óðinn sét ór Hliðskjálfinni hvar hann var. Hann hljóp þegar upp ok út í ána ok kastaði netinu fram á eldinn. En er Æsir koma til hússins þá gekk sá fyrst inn er allra var vitrastr, er Kvasir heitir. Ok er hann sá á eldinum fǫlskann er netit hafði brunnit þá skilði hann at þat mundi væl vera til at taka fiska, ok sagði Ásunum. Því næst tóku þeir ok gerðu sér net eptir því sem þeir sá á fǫlska at Loki hafði gert. Ok er búit var netit þá fara Æsir til árinnar ok kasta neti í forsinn (Gylf., 48). [18]

Loki tries to get into the heads of his pursuers and anticipate what *vél* they might use. He sits musing into his fire and just invents another device that is directly linked to his cunning ingenuity, a net. In a *hysteron proteron* sequence, he realises that the *Æsir* are close, and the remark that Óðinn had seen from Hliðskjálf where Loki dwelt appears at the position that would resemble Loki's path of reasoning when thinking about the cause for him being detected. Thus, Loki's line of thought goes backwards: It starts with him imagining what the Æsir might come up with or what device they might invent to catch him in the waterfall, proceeds to the actual production of such a technological device and ends at Óðinn's lookout, while the *Æsir*'s actions span from their starting point, Hliðskjálf, to them finally catching Loki in his own trap (i.e. net), the cunning device he invented.

Kvasir, notably the wisest of the *Æsir*, comes, sees, and understands immediately what he sees: He analyses and reconstructs the device based on the pattern in the ashes, and he understands its potential use, after which he tells the *Æsir*. Thus, he introduces this new technology to the community, who collectively make use of it.

Thus, the aetiological myth of the invention of the fishing net and the catching of Loki who has morphed into a fish stands out in fact as a myth of technical invention itself. The central problem is that Loki has shifted shape and has a hiding place that is beyond the god's reach, so they need a tool as an extension of their physical abilities. The myth parallels the finding of Loki and the finding of the net; it comprises a problem to be solved (Loki has to be caught), active striving for its solution (Óðinn looks for him and

[18] "'Then he pondered what sort of device the Æsir would be likely to think up to catch him in the waterfall. And as he sat in the house he took some linen thread and tied knots in it in the way in which ever since a net has been. A fire was burning in front of him. Then he noticed that the Æsir were only a short distance away from him, and Odin had seen where he was from Hlidskialf. He immediately jumped up and out into the river throwing the net down into the fire. And when the Æsir reached the house then the first to enter was the wisest of all, called Kvasir. And when he saw in the fire the shape in the ashes where the net had burned he realized that it must be a device to catch fish, and told the Æsir. After that they went and made themselves a net just like what they saw in the ashes that Loki had made. And when the net was finished the Æsir went to the river and threw the net into the waterfall'" (Faulkes 1995, 51–52).

locates him), analytical reasoning (Kvasir analyses the ashes and understands that this would be a *vél* to catch fish), the (re)construction of a tool (the *Æsir* collectively make a net according to the design they discovered) and its application (they catch Loki with the net). By Loki using both head and hands and inventing the net for the first time, while it is the *Æsir* who need it and immediately re-invent it through an analysis of its remains, the myth oscillates between the two aspects of *inventio:* The discovery of what always has been there, as a potential and e.g. the property of a material, and the development and application of what is new and has never been heard of. In Snorri's account of the myth, one even finds a subsequent testing and improvement of the device in the three attempts to catch Loki. In the myth of the invention of the fishing net in *Snorra Edda*, we have thus a complex description of how the *Æsir* as a group could develop a tool, forming a detailed parallel to the summarising statement of Vsp. 7 (*þeir logðu / smiðoðo / skópu / gørðu*).

One might wonder whether the myth about the invention of the fishing net is designed to allude to Loki's gender-ambivalence by intertextual play. *Pamfíluss saga* contains a catalogue of uses of *vélar*, one of them being *með vél er fiskr tekinn er under skirri baro er*, translating the Latin *piscis liquidis deprenditur arte sub undis*.[19] This hexameter could seem to provide a gnomic statement about an art or craft or cunning, as such applicable to everyone. Yet, in *Pamfíluss saga*, a translation of the Pseudo-Ovidian *Pamphilus de amore*, it is the context that adds a gendered twist. Venus—as she appears in the soliloquy of the protagonist (cf. Dronke 1979, 227)—is giving advice to a distraught lover, and here, the gendered imagery of love-hunting is structured along well-established lines: the hunter (fisherman) is male, the victim (fish) female. This is by no means to suggest that the ON myth had its origin in the Latin text – one might rather speculate about the reader response at the time the *Prose Edda* was written in terms of a gendered perspective on arts, crafts and their invention and uses. Loki's transformation from the anthropomorphic inventor of the fishing net, thus being in the role of a male creator god, into the fish could seem another of his several transitions from a male to a female being or role. Ovid's *Ars amatoria* which has informed the *Pamphilus de amore*, also uses fishing imagery among its many pieces of advice, cf. the distich *Hi iaculo pisces, illi capiuntur ab hamis: / Hos cava contento retia fune trahunt* (I, 763–64) ('These fishes you spear, those are caught with hooks, and others again are drawn up with a taut rope in the hollow net'). Interestingly, in Ovid's *Remedia amoris*, the would-be lover is advised to deceive himself by being busy with hunting or fishing (cf. Thiébaux 2015, 98–99).

Turco argues that the detail of the net (and not the hook) might be "a 'late' addition" and that the gods' fishing expedition was "a younger feature of the story of 'the binding of Loki'"—he points to the depiction of the gods' acting collaboratively, which was first to be found in Snorri's *Edda* (Turco 2016, 220). I would rather perceive this myth as related to Vsp. 7: Both feature technology, and also in the Vsp. stanza, the gods act collaboratively. The important difference is, though, that within Snorri's system, metallurgy and smithing are not invented by the gods, but are introduced to the North from Troy, whereas the invention of the fishing net, narrated step-by-step, stands out as

[19] Cf. ONP https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?c804360.

a complex process of applied ingenuity.

Conclusion

According to *Snorra Edda*, advanced technologies have their roots in Troy and are the subject of a full-scale elite-driven technology transfer, leading to the development of the North. The legend of how the *Æsir* left Troy, migrated to Sweden and established a new realm characterised by their higher level of knowledge and skills is at its core an Old Icelandic version of the topos of *translatio studii et imperii*, found in several Old Norse texts. According to the so-called *Upphaf allra frásagnar* the Ásiamenn, in Snorri's *Edda* the *Æsir*, also brought with them their Norse language which then spread across Saxony, Scandinavia, and a part of England (cf. Gunnar Harðarson 2016, 48). While *The First Grammatical Treatise* focuses on the transferal of the language and *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla* includes poetry, "the prologue of *Edda* has the *Æsir* bringing with them the political structure of society as well; together these imply the whole culture" (Gunnar Harðarson 2016, 49).

In *Snorra Edda*, technology is not only represented by superbly crafted objects (the 'best' or 'greatest' house, bridge, ship, hammer, sword etc.), but some myths describe technological processes in greater detail than the narrative itself or the moral dimensions of the myth would require. As for the mead of poetry myth, the many details and steps in its production can be explained by the many related *kenningar* and the central place of this myth in a work on poetry. Yet the level of detail could not as easily be explained in the same way in the case of the invention of the fishing net or the smithing of precious items by the dwarfs, as the counterpart—*kenningar* relating to details—is missing.

The ambivalence of technology in *Snorra Edda* seems primarily to lie in inventiveness itself, hence the ambivalence of technology and its uses. This ambivalence is often lexically covered by the Old Norse word *vél*, the meaning of which spans from cunning and technical intelligence to cleverly designed tools and machines, with Loki and Óðinn as its most prominent agents. A separate critical technology assessment based on the consequences of its application is scarce—what comes closest is the myth of the mill Grotti constantly milling salt at sea and making the sea salty when finally sinking the overloaded ship (Skskm., 52). It lies in the nature of the aetiological myth of technology that origins/causes and consequences are two sides of the same coin. What ends the *Fróða friðr* in Denmark—the Golden Age of peace, abundance and prosperity—is greed, resulting in the overuse of the cornucopian mill by king Fróði and his downfall (ibid.). Another critical aspect voiced by Gylfi/Gangleri is the use of magic during the production of a masterpiece of craftsmanship: *Gott skip er Skíðblaðnir, en allmikil fjǫlkyngi mun við vera hǫfð áðr svá fái gert* (Gylf., 36).[20] For a medieval audience, this would be another and perhaps the most worrying possibility of how craftsmen could deceive in their arts or crafts, as *Elucidarius* remarks. In summary, any truly stunning mastery of arts and crafts in real-life might raise the suspicion that some sort of magic might have been involved.

[20] "'Skidbladnir is a good ship, but it must require a very great deal of magic to make something like that'" (Faulkes 1995, 37).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Clem. = *Klements saga* = Larsson, Ludvig, ed. 1885. *Isländska handskriften N° 645 4° i den Arnamagnæanska samlingen på universitetsbiblioteket i København*, 33–74. Malmström.

Eluc. = Firchow, Evelyn Scherabon, and Karen Grimstad, eds. 1989. *Elucidarius in Old Norse Translation*. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

Elucidarius = Firchow, Evelyn Scherabon, ed. and transl. 1992. *The Old Norse 'Elucidarius:' Original Text and English Translation*. Camden House.

Icelandic Homily Book = de Leeuw van Weenen, Andrea, ed. 1993. *The Icelandic Homily Book: Perg. 15 4° in the Royal Library, Stockholm*. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

Niðrstigningar saga = Bullitta, Dario. 2017. *Niðrstigningar saga: Sources, Transmission, and Theology of the Old Norse "Descent into Hell."* University of Toronto Press.

Prol., Gylf. = *Snorra Edda* = Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 2005. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. 2nd ed. Viking Society for Northern Research.

SnE = *Snorra Edda* = Faulkes, Anthony, transl. 1995. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda*. J. M. Dent.

SnE (U) = *Snorra Edda* = Heimir Pálsson, ed. 2012. Snorri Sturluson. *The Uppsala Edda, DG 11 4to*, translated by Anthony Faulkes. The Viking Society for Northern Research.

Skskm. = *Snorra Edda* = Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1998. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál. 1. Introduction, Text and Notes*. The Viking Society for Northern Research.

The Poetic Edda = Larrington, Carolyne, transl. 2014. *The Poetic Edda*. 2nd edition. Oxford University Press.

TrójHb = *Trojumanna saga* = Louis-Jensen, Jonna, ed. 1963. *Trójumanna saga*. Munksgaard.

Vsp., Ls. = von See, Klaus, et al. 1997–2019. *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 7 vols. Winter.

Secondary Sources

Barndon, Randi. 2006. "Myth and Metallurgy: Some Cross-Cultural Reflections on the Social Identity of Smiths." In *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes & Interactions*, edited by Anders Andrén and Kristina Jennbert, 99–103. Nordic Academic Press.

Baumbach, Manuel. 2006. "Protos heuretes." In *Brill's New Pauly Online*, edited by Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, DOI: 10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1011460, accessed 1 June 2024.

Bayerl, Günter. 2013. *Technik in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*. Theiss.

Beck, Heinrich. 2007. "Die Uppsala-Edda und Snorri Sturlusons Konstruktion einer skandinavischen Vorzeit." *Scripta Islandica* 58: 5–32.

Binding, Günther. 2014. "Bauwissen im Früh- und Hochmittelalter." In *Wissensgeschichte der Architektur: Band III: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Frühen Neuzeit*, edited by Jürgen Renn, Wilhelm Osthues and Hermann Schlimme, 9–94. Neopubli.

Binding, Günther, and Susanne Linscheid-Burdich. 2002. *Planen und Bauen im frühen und hohen Mittelalter nach den Schriftquellen bis 1250*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1994. *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northers Society*. Vol. 1: The Myths. Odense University Press.

Deming, David. 2010. *Science and Technology in World History*. Vol. 2: Early Christianity, the Rise of Islam and the Middle Ages. 4 vols. McFarland.

Dronke, Peter. 1979. "A Note on *Pamphilus*." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 42: 225–30.

Farioli, Marcella. 2010. "The Genesis of the Cosmos, the Search for the Arche and the Finding of Aitia in Classical Greek Culture." In *Origins as a Paradigm in the Sciences and in the Humanities*, edited by Paola Spinozzi and Alessandro Zironi, 195–209. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Gassman, David Louis. 1973. "*Translatio studii*: A Study of Intellectual History in the Thirteenth Century." DPhil diss., Cornell University.

Gies, Frances, and Joseph Gies. 1994. *Cathedral, Forge, and Waterwheel: Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages*. HarperCollins.

Ginevra, Riccardo. 2023. "Loki's Chains, Agni's Yoke, Prometheus Bound, and the Old English Boethius." *Indogermanische Forschungen* 128: 203–252.

Götlind, Anna. 1993. "Technology and Religion in Medieval Sweden." PhD diss., University of Gothenburg.

Gunnar Harðarson. 2016. "Old Norse Intellectual Culture: Appropriation and Innovation." In *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia, c. 1100–1350*, edited by Stefka Georgieva Eriksen, 35–73. Brepols.

Hägermann, Dieter, and Helmuth Schneider. 1997. *Propyläen Technikgeschichte*. Vol. 1: Landbau und Handwerk 750 v. Chr. bis 1000 n. Chr. 2nd edition. Propyläen.

Hedeager, Lotte. 2011. *Iron Age Myth and Materiality: An Archaeology of Scandinavia AD 400–1000*. Routledge.

Hultgård, Anders. 2004. "Schöpfungsmythen." In *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*. Vol. 27, edited by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich and Heiko Steuer, 242–56. 35[+2] vols. De Gruyter.

Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson. 2004. "Schmied, Schmiedehandwerk, Schmiedewerkzeuge. I: Begriff." In *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*. Vol. 27, edited by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich and Heiko Steuer, 194–97. 35[+2] vols. De Gruyter.

Junker, Klaus, and Sabrina Strohwald. 2012. *Götter als Erfinder: Die Entstehung der Kultur in der griechischen Kunst*. Philipp von Zabern.

Lindgren, Uta, ed. 2001. *Europäische Technik im Mittelalter 800–1400. Tradition und Innovation*. 4th edition. Gebr. Mann.

Lindow, John. 2001. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford University Press.

Ludwig, Karl-Heinz, and Volker Schmidtchen. 1992. *Propyläen Technikgeschichte*. Vol. 2: Metalle und Macht 1000 bis 1600. Propyläen.

McClellan, James Edward, and Harold Dorn. 2006. *Science and Technology in World History: An Introduction*. 2nd edition. Johns Hopkins University Press.

van Nahl, Jan. 2013. *Snorri Sturlusons Mythologie und die mittelalterliche Theologie*. De Gruyter.

Popplow, Marcus. 2020. *Technik im Mittelalter*. 2nd edition. C.H. Beck.

Roland, Alex. 2003. "Once More into the Stirrups: Lynn White Jr., 'Medieval Technology and Social Change.'" *Technology and Culture* 44: 574–85.

Ruggerini, Maria Elena. 2006. "Tales of Flight in Old Norse and Medieval English Texts." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2: 201–38.

Teichert, Matthias. 2013. "Das Goldzeitalter: Latinität und Fragmente eines griechisch-römischen Mythos in der *Gylfaginning*." In *Snorri Sturluson – Historiker, Dichter, Politiker*, edited by Heinrich Beck, Wilhelm Heizmann and Jan Alexander van Nahl, 129–50. De Gruyter.

Thiébaux, Marcelle. 2015. *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature*. Cornell University Press.

Turco, Jeffrey. 2016. "Nets and Snares: The Loki of Snorri's *Edda* and the Christian Tradition." *History of Religions* 56: 198–231.

Walther, Sabine Heidi. 2015. *Erzählen vom Anfang: Schöpfungs- und Gründungsmythen im hochmittelalterlichen Island*. PhD diss., University of Bonn.

Wanner, Kevin J. 2009. "Cunning Intelligence in Norse Myth: Loki, Óðinn, and the Limits of Sovereignty." *History of Religions* 48: 211–46.

White, Lynn, Jr.. 1940. "Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages." *Speculum* 15: 141–59.

White, Lynn, Jr. 1962. *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. Oxford University Press.

Zachrisson, Torun. 2017. "Volund Was Here: A Myth Archaeologically Anchored in Viking Age Scania." In *Old Norse Mythology— Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell and Jens Peter Schjødt, 139–62. Harvard University Press.

GODS, DWARVES, AND HUMANS: *VǪLUSPÁ* STS. 9–18

Rory McTurk*

In a recent book, John Lindow (2021, 28) draws attention to "the difficult lines in *Vǫluspá* st. 9," raising the question of what these lines have to tell us about the dwarves of Old Norse mythology. In this essay I offer a critical examination of some recent interpretations of this stanza with a view to suggesting which of them accounts most satisfactorily for what is described in the stanzas which follow it, most especially sts. 17–18. After an account of the main manuscripts of the eddic poem *Vǫluspá* it will be shown that the "difficult lines" (5–8) in st. 9 of this poem raise the question of whether the stanza is referring to the creation of the dwarves by the gods, or to the creation by the dwarves of one or more of their number and/or the first human beings. It will be seen that in answering this question much hangs on how the syntactic function of the genitive plural *dverga* 'of (the) dwarves' in line 5 is understood. A comparison will then be made of two studies of the dwarves in relation to Old Norse creation mythology that were published at much the same time (1983 and 1984) and written apparently independently of one another.

Vǫluspá, the opening poem in the collection of mythological and heroic poems preserved in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda (K, i.e. *Konungsbók*, GKS 2365 4to), dating from the second half of the thirteenth century, is also preserved in one of the three manuscripts known collectively as *Hauksbók*, namely AM 544 4to (here designated as H), dating from the early fourteenth century. A good number of the poem's stanzas are also preserved in manuscripts of Snorri's prose *Edda* (SnE), of which for present purposes it will be sufficient to list here the four main ones: three from the fourteenth century, namely GKS 2367 4to (SnK), Codex Wormianus, i.e. AM 242 fol. (SnW), and Codex Upsaliensis, i.e. Uppsala University Library DG 11 4to (SnU); and one from ca. 1595: Codex Trajectinus, i.e. Utrecht University Library MS no. 1374 (SnT). The stanzas in question occur as quotations in *Gylfaginning*, the second of the prose *Edda*'s four parts.

* Professor emeritus of Icelandic Studies, University of Leeds.

It remains true that, as Sigurður Nordal (1923, 2; 1978, 2) wrote just over a hundred years ago: "Everyone agrees that K is the principal manuscript and must therefore be the basis of any text." Jón Helgason (1962, v–ix) maintains that the differences between, on the one hand, the versions of *Vǫluspá* preserved in its two main manuscripts, K and H, and, on the other, between each of those two versions and the fragmentary version preserved in manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda*, are such that the three versions cannot be interrelated scribally: they must all three have been recorded independently of each other from oral tradition. This is also the view taken by two recent joint editors of the Poetic Edda, Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 92–95); they reaffirm it after criticizing the much more complicated view of Ursula Dronke (1997, 63–65), who argues that the original *Vǫluspá*, composed orally ca. 1000 AD, and having essentially the same structure as that of K, was reproduced with this same structure in a written version, now lost, dating from ca. 1200. This version formed the basis of a second written version, also lost, which interpolated the passage about the nescience of the heavenly bodies and the list of dwarf names (both found in K, H, and SnE, see Jón Helgason 1962, 2n5, 3–5). K and H, in this view, descend independently of one another from this second written version, with K following it closely but H giving evidence of revision carried out in the course of SnE's composition and later. Jónas and Vésteinn criticize this view on the grounds that the poem is unlikely to have remained so little changed in oral tradition for two whole centuries, and that the divergences among its surviving versions are of a kind more likely to have arisen in the course of oral transmission than as a result of miscopying by scribes. Jón Helgason's view, accepted by Jónas and Vésteinn, and noted above, is also accepted here.

In returning now to the "difficult lines" in st. 9, referred to by Lindow, it will be convenient to print side by side, as a basis for discussing these lines, the K and H texts of st. 9 in the normalized spelling of Jónas's and Vésteinn's edition (2014, 293, 309)[1], though with emendation shown (in italics) only in the one instance where sense cannot be made of the original. The translations that follow each text are my own:

K	**H**
Þá gengu regin ǫll	Þá gengu regin ǫll
á røkstóla,	á røkstóla,
ginnheilǫg goð,	ginnheilǫg goð,
ok um þat gættusk,	ok um þat gættusk,
hverr skyldi dverga	hverir skyldu dvergar
dróttin skepja	dróttir skepja
ór Brimis blóði	ór brimi blóðgu
ok ór blám leggjum.	ok ór Blá*ins* leggjum.

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, this spelling is used here for consistency's sake in quotations from *Vǫluspá*, including those of Steinsland (1983), whose normalized spelling for quotations from the Poetic Edda differs little from that used here and reflects her use of a large number of editions (see p. 106), including Sigurður Nordal's of *Vǫluspá* (1923) and the 1964 printing of Jón Helgason 1962.

Then all the gods	Then all the gods
proceeded to judgement seats	proceeded to judgement seats
– most holy gods –	– most holy gods –
and discussed this:	and discussed this:
who was to create	which dwarves were to
the lord of dwarves	create troops
from Brimir's blood	from bloody surf
and from blue limbs.	and from Bláinn's limbs.

(The reading *Blá*ins, where H has *bláms*, is supplied from the corresponding passage in SnW).

The "difficult lines" here are lines 5–8 of the stanza, where the two versions disagree; the first four lines, which are identical in both versions, present no problems. The translation of K, given above, reflects the tendency of most editors and commentators to take *dverga* 'of dwarves' in line 5 as a genitive plural governed by the object of *skepja* 'create,' which in K is *dróttin* 'lord,' as shown above. This may be illustrated by reference to some recent editions.

Ursula Dronke (1997, 9) emends *hverr* 'who' to *hv*árt 'whether' in line 5, reads *skyldi* in that line as impersonal and emends *dróttin* in line 6 to *dróttr*ir 'troops' (from H), taking this as the object of *skepja* and governing the genitive plural *dverga*, giving literally the meaning 'whether [one] should create companies of dwarves,' and translating: "whether they should create companies of dwarfs." She also emends *blám* in line 8 to *Blá*ins 'Bláinn's' (from SnW), taking both *Brimir* in line 7 and *Bláinn* here as names of Ymir, the mythical giant from whose blood the sea was created and from whose bones (or possibly legs) rocks or mountains were formed, according to the eddic poems *Grímnismál* sts. 40–41 (quoted in *Gylfaginning*, see Faulkes 2005, 12) and *Vafþrúðnismál* st. 21.

Gísli Sigurðsson (1998, 5) retains with no emendation the text of K as quoted above. His commentary shows that he understands the genitive *dverga* in line 5 as governed by *dróttin* in line 6, giving the meaning 'lord of dwarves.' He notes that *Brimis* refers most probably to Ymir since the sea (cf. Old Norse *brim* 'surf') was imagined as formed from his blood (see the previous paragraph). He further notes that according to *Gylfaginning* one of Ymir's legs begot with the other a son, the ancestor of the frost-giants, and clearly understands *leggjum* 'limbs' in line 8, above, in the sense 'legs,' suggesting that Ymir's legs may have been of use to the gods in their act of creation. He further suggests that the adjective *blár* 'blue, black' here refers to the color of Ymir's corpse, and notes that, again according to *Gylfaginning*, the dwarves originated as maggots in Ymir's flesh (see Faulkes 2005, 10–11, 15).

Jónas and Vésteinn (2014, 293) leave the text of st. 9 in K unemended apart from adopting the emendation *Blá*ins (cf. Dronke above) in place of *blám*. They print the K, H, and SnE texts of *Vǫluspá* in their entirety one after the other and except in the case of *Blá*ins do not indicate in the K text of st. 9 emendations that might be made from either of the other two texts. They draw attention in their introduction (pp. 105–6) to the ambiguity of *hverr* 'who' in line 5, raising the question of whether this refers to one of

the gods or to one of the dwarves, and hint at the possibility that the gods are here debating whether to delegate the responsibility for creation to the dwarves. (It will be shown below that this ambiguity is present only if the genitive *dverga* in line 5 is understood to be governed by *dróttin* in line 6). These two editors nevertheless seem confident, no doubt recognizing a need for emendation here (of *dróttin* to *dróttir* from H?), that the stanza is essentially about the creation of the dwarves by the gods from the body parts of Ymir. They accept (p. 293n) that *Brimir* and *Bláinn* are both names for Ymir (cf. Dronke and Gísli, above), the former because it is related to *brim* 'surf' and the latter because the adjective *blár* 'blue,' from which it is formed, refers to the color of the sky, which according to the poetic sources noted above was formed from Ymir's skull.

Klaus von See and others (2019, 128–32) also leave the text of K unemended apart from noting the addition of a second <t> to the manuscript's *drotin* in line 6, finding that in this manuscript the occurrence of single for double <t> is exceptional when occurring medially rather than terminally. Their German translation of the stanza deviates from the one above only in the final line, which they translate as *und aus dunklen Knochen* 'and from dark bones;' their *den Herrn der Zwerge* shows clearly that they understand the genitive *dverga* to be governed by *dróttin*, the object of *skepja*. While acknowledging that the reference to creation from bones does recall what is told of the world's creation from Ymir's body parts in the sources mentioned above, they are reluctant to accept that the creation of a dwarf or dwarves (the concern of this stanza as they see it) should necessarily be viewed in this light, and find no firm evidence for the equation of Brimir (or indeed Bláinn) with Ymir. They quote the passage from *Gylfaginning* about the gods discussing on their thrones how the dwarves had begun their lives as maggots in Ymir's flesh, but were later given intelligence and human form by divine decree, cf. Faulkes 2005, 15. They see this passage as a paraphrase of the stanza under discussion, and not, as might be expected from their evident dissatisfaction with the stanza, as reflecting an ancient tradition that might explain it. Their avoidance of the 'blue legs' interpretation could well be explained by their reference to ch. 85 of *Morkinskinna*, in which Sigurðr Jórsalafari identifies as a prostitute a woman whose leg is both blue and fat!

Edward Pettit (2023, 40–41, 54, 58nn33–36) also treats the second <t> in *dróttin* as an emendation, but otherwise prints the text of K as shown above and gives a translation which is in all essentials the same as the one above, with *dverga dróttin* conveying 'the lord of dwarves.' (He gives however "which one of the dwarves should create a lord" as an alternative translation of lines 5–6 in K; cf. Hermann Pálsson, below). He sees *Brimir* as "probably here a giant-name (an alias of Ymir?) and suggestive of the sea (*brim* 'surf'), his blood being its waters." He regards *bláir leggjar* "blue limbs (or legs)" as a kenning (hardly of standard type, it must be said) for "rocks," while also claiming that the color might suggest necrosis (cf. Gísli Sigurðsson, above). As for *Bláins* in H, he notes correctly that *Bláinn* is attested as a dwarf-*heiti*, but suggests that it perhaps serves here as an alias of Ymir.

This stanza then, as interpreted in the five commentaries so far considered, is telling us that the gods were discussing whether to create companies of dwarves (as Dronke has it) or who (as suggested by the remaining four) should create the dwarves' leader or

lord. It will be seen that the genitive *dverga* 'of dwarves,' governed by *dróttir* 'companies' in Dronke's text and by *dróttin* 'lord' in the others, is in the former case partitive and in the latter possessive.

Going back somewhat in time, we may note that Hermann Pálsson (1996, 48, 64–66) prints the text of st. 9 in K exactly as printed above, but differs from the editors so far mentioned (see however Pettit, above) in taking the genitive *dverga* in line 5 as governed not by the object of *skepja* but by the interrogative (and distributive) pronoun *hverr* 'who, which,' used in a partitive sense, and giving the meaning 'who (i.e. which) of the dwarves should create a leader.' Hermann seems to accept the identification of Brimir with Ymir because of the concept of the sea formed from Ymir's blood and the fact of *brim* meaning 'surf,' but does not commit himself to the *bláir leggjar* of line 8 apart from understanding *leggr* to mean specifically 'shin-bone.'

Going still further back in time, we may now refer to Tryggvi Gíslason (1984), who anticipates Hermann in taking the genitive *dverga* in line 5 as partitive and governed by *hverr*, and anticipates Dronke in emending *dróttin* in line 6 to *dróttir*, but differs from all the editors so far mentioned in understanding *dróttir* in the sense of 'people, human beings' in general, pointing out that this is clearly the sense of *dróttir* in *Vǫluspá* st. 64 (as numbered by Jón Helgason (1962, 14–15): *þar skulu dyggvar* / *dróttir byggja* 'there shall virtuous people live,' and indeed claiming that if this word were used with reference to the dwarves of *Vǫluspá* in st. 9 (as Dronke, 1997, believes it is, as shown above), this would be the only instance of its use with reference to non-human beings in the whole of Old Norse-Icelandic literature. The stanza may now be quoted as Tryggvi quotes it (p. 84) from Jón Helgason's emended text of K (1962, 2), showing Jón's emendations (accepted but not shown by Tryggvi) in italics, and with my own facing translation:

Þá gengo regin ǫll	Then all the gods proceeded
á røkstóla,	to judgement seats
ginnheilog goð,	– most holy gods –
ok um þat gættuz,	and discussed this:
hverr skyldi dverga	which one of the dwarves should
dróttir skepia	create human beings
ór Brimis blóði	from Brimir's blood
ok ór Bláins leggiom.	and from Bláinn's limbs.

As noted above, Jónas and Vésteinn (2014, 105–6) draw attention to the ambiguity of *hverr* 'who' that is apparent in the K text if the genitive *dverga* is understood to be governed by the object of *skepja*. The ambiguity raises the question of whether *hverr* refers to a god or a dwarf. It is likely that Gísli, von See and others, Pettit, and even in the last analysis Jónas and Vésteinn, see it on balance as referring to one of the gods, with the gods envisaged as discussing which of their number is to create the lord of dwarves. Both Hermann Pálsson and Tryggvi Gíslason differ from these editors, and indeed from Dronke (who emends *hverr* to *hvárt*, see above) in linking the genitive plural *dverga* syntactically with *hverr* rather than with the object of *skepja*, giving the genitive

partitive sense. In Hermann's reading of the stanza *hverr* clearly refers to one of the dwarves, and the gods are discussing which of the dwarves should create a leader, presumably for themselves, i.e. for the dwarves. In Tryggvi's reading, on the other hand, *hverr* also refers to one of the dwarves, but what the gods are discussing here is which of the dwarves is to create the human race: a reading which seems to find support in lines 5–6 of the H text (*hverir skyldu dvergar* / *dróttir skepja* 'which dwarves should create troops'), provided that *dróttir* 'troops' can be understood in the sense of 'people, human beings.'

The manuscript variants of the next stanza, st. 10, in lines 1–4 of which, in K and H, the dwarves Mótsognir (Móðsognir H) and Durinn are introduced (cf. the prose of *Gylfaginning*, Faulkes 2005, 15) offer three possible interpretations of lines 5–7: first K: *þeir mannlíkun* / *mǫrg um gørðu*, / *dvergar*, *ór jǫrðu* 'those dwarves made many man-like figures out of earth' (SnU has *í* in place of *ór*, giving *í jǫrðu* 'in the earth'); secondly H: *þeir mannlíkun* / *mǫrg of gørðu*, / *dverga*, *í jǫrðu* 'they made many man-like figures, dwarves, in the earth;' and thirdly SnK, SnW, SnT: *Þar mannlíkun* / *mǫrg of gørðusk*, / *dvergar*, *í jǫrðu* 'there many man-like figures, dwarves, were made in the earth.' Tryggvi, having argued for the dwarves in st. 9 as creators rather than created, and as creators of human beings, naturally chooses the first of these. So also does Gro Steinsland (1983), even though she believes, as we shall see, that the concern of st. 9 is the creation of the dwarves.

Tryggvi's reading of st. 9 has the great advantage of giving a meaning consistent with what is told in subsequent stanzas of the poem: st. 10, where it is said (in K, SnU, and H, as shown) that the dwarves Mótsognir and Durinn made *mannlíkun* 'man-like figures,' and sts. 17 and 18, where three of the gods, including Óðinn, find the fateless figures Askr ('ash-tree') and Embla ('elm'?), arguably the result of the dwarves' craftsmanship, and Óðinn breathes into them the breath of life, thus assisting in bringing to completion the creation of the couple described in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* as the ancestors of the human race (Faulkes 205, 13; on *Embla*, see Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 152–53). These stanzas have been carefully studied by Gro Steinsland (1983) in an article published a year before Tryggvi's article, which it supplements in many ways, although Steinsland believes, unlike Tryggvi, that *Vǫluspá* st. 9 is about the creation of the dwarves, as noted above. It is true that she would accept from H the same emendations as Tryggvi does to the K text of this stanza, as is shown by her quotation on p. 83, *hverr skyldi dverga* / *dróttir skepja*, and by her reference on p. 90 to Brimir's blood and Bláinn's limbs; it is also true that like Tryggvi she takes the genitive *dverga* as partitive. It is clear, however, that unlike him she sees this genitive as governed by *dróttir* 'troops' rather than by *hverr* 'who, which' and that she would translate her quotation as "who was to create troops of dwarves," seeing as the subject of the gods' debate in this stanza the question of who was to create these troops from Ymir's blood and limbs. This question, she claims (p. 85), is answered in st. 10, where the dwarves Mótsognir and Durinn, the earliest members of these troops, are described as making *mannlíkun* 'man-like figures.' These figures, if I have understood her argument, are themselves dwarves, but are also rudimentary human beings.

There is a certain awkwardness about this argument. Stanza 9, according to Steinsland (1983, 85, 86), raises the question of who is to create the dwarves, as we have seen, and it is immediately followed by st. 10, in which the dwarves Mótsognir and Durinn, already created, are described as making man-like figures. How Mótsognir and Durinn came to be created, or who created them, is not described. This means, then, that if the figures they are making are themselves dwarves, the origins of the dwarves can be traced back no further than to Mótsognir and Durinn, raising the question of how those two came to be there in the first place. What Tryggvi (1984, 86) argues, on the other hand, is that the dwarves, like the gods and the giants, were believed to be already in existence before the creation of the earth and of humans. While the evidence he cites for this – *Grímnismál* st. 43 and *Alvíssmál* – is perhaps questionable, his argument in any case makes for a smoother transition than Steinsland's from st. 9 to st. 10. In st. 9, as Tryggvi reads it, the gods are raising the question of which of the dwarves will create humankind. If the question is 'which *one* (*hverr*) of the dwarves,' as K would have it, then the answer is Mótsognir, described in st. 10, lines 1–3 as *mæztr* […] *dverga allra* 'the best, most excellent of all dwarves;' if the question is 'which dwarves' (*hverir* […] *dvergar*), as H has it, requiring a plural answer, then the answer is Mótsognir and Durinn, the latter described as *annarr* 'the second (in command)' or 'the next best' in st. 10, line 4, not to mention the large number of dwarves listed by name in sts. 11–16, which Tryggvi believes, however (p. 86), are in all probability interpolated.

Steinsland's and Tryggvi's articles seem to have been written independently of one another. They are in disagreement, as has been shown, as to the circumstances of humankind's creation as portrayed in *Vǫluspá*. While both of them argue that the human race is here portrayed as owing its ultimate origin to the dwarves' handwork, Steinsland's argument, with its apparent implication that the first dwarves, Mótsognir and Durinn, had to create themselves before they could undertake the handwork, seems needlessly complicated (not to say absurd) in comparison with Tryggvi's. Furthermore Steinsland (1983, 82–85), unlike Tryggvi (and many others), is disinclined to believe that stanzas 11–16 of *Vǫluspá* – containing the list of dwarf names – are interpolated. Her lengthy discussion nevertheless merits comparison with Tryggvi's relatively brief treatment on a number of points.

Taking *þeir* 'they' in line 5 of st. 10 as referring specifically to Mótsognir and Durinn in lines 1 and 4, Steinsland (1983, 85) sees these two dwarves as initiating the making of the *mannlíkun* 'man-like figures,' of which they make many (*mǫrg*, line 6) from earth (*ór jǫrðu*, line 7 in K; SnU and H have *í jǫrðu* 'in earth,' as shown above). Fastening on the word *mǫrg* 'many,' Steinsland sees Mótsognir and Durinn as engaged in mass production, turning out numerous man-like beings, in fact, dwarves, specified by name in stanzas 11–16, which Tryggvi (1984, 86) believes, as we have seen, are probably interpolated. As for *ór jǫrðu* 'out of earth,' Tryggvi has no difficulty (p. 87) in seeing this as recalling the creation of human beings 'from the blood and limbs of Ymir,' as envisaged in lines 4–8 of stanza 9. Steinsland (1983, 90–91), on the other hand, who sees those lines as referring to the creation not of humans but of dwarves, understands *jǫrð* in stanza 10 as signifying earth as the third element in the dwarves' physical

constitution, all three elements of which they are now imparting to their man-like figures, the other two elements being water and stone, signified respectively by the blood and limbs of Ymir (an example, perhaps, of the relatively complicated nature of Steinsland's argument!). She also notes (p. 84) that among the stanzas (11–16) regarded by Tryggvi and others as probably interpolated, stanza 14 (lines 1–4) is of interest with its statement that the time has come to trace for the benefit of the children of men (*ljóna kindum*) the ancestry of the dwarves in Dvalinn's *lið* ('troop, company') to one Lofarr, her point being that the stanza is stressing the importance for humans of being aware of their dwarfish origins; and she evidently understands *langniðjatal / Lofars* in st. 16, lines 7–8 (cf. Jón Helgason 1962, 5), as the 'list of Lofarr's descendants,' taking it to refer to the list given in the preceding stanzas. (Is Lofarr then a forerunner of Mótsognir and Durinn?).

Making the reasonable emendation of feminine *þrjár* (found in both K and H) to masculine *þrír* in line 1 of stanza 17 (also adopted by Tryggvi 1984, 87), allowing it to qualify *æsir* 'gods' in line 4, Steinsland (1983, 81–92) proceeds to discuss in rather more detail than Tryggvi this stanza's account of how three of the gods found Askr and Embla. She sees the description of the three as *ór því liði* 'from that group,' found only in K, st. 17, line 2) as referring back to the *regin ǫll* of stanza 9 (by quite a leap if the intervening stanzas about the dwarves are not regarded as interpolated) (p. 83) and the adjectives *ǫflgir* and *ástkir* 'powerful' and 'benevolent' (line 3) as showing them to belong to an order of being superior to that of the dwarves (p. 87). They are said in line 4 to arrive *at húsi*, which Steinsland interprets as meaning simply 'on the scene' (but why should *hús* 'house' not refer here to the workshop where the dwarves are making their manlike figures, mentioned by her in much the same context, pp. 85–86?). They find Askr and Embla *á landi*, understood by Steinsland to mean not so much 'on the shore,' as Tryggvi understands it (p. 87), as "(lying) on the ground, on the surface of the newly created earth," that is, of the earth as raised from the sea by the sons of Burr (as may be deduced from *Vǫluspá* sts. 4, 59, as numbered by Jón Helgason 1962, 1, 14), and symbolizing order as opposed to the chaos symbolized by the sea (pp. 88–89). The expressions *lítt megandi* and *ørlǫglausa*, used in lines 6 and 8 to describe Askr and Embla (and in the latter case specifying masculine rather than neuter gender for them both), are interpreted by Tryggvi (p. 87) as 'powerless' (*kraftløse*) and 'without fate' (*uten lagnad*) respectively, while Steinsland (p. 88) emphasizes the lifelessness implied by the former expression and her sense that what the latter expression conveys as lacking is fate understood as an ordered (as opposed to chaotic) existence. As for Askr and Embla themselves, Steinsland (p. 91) recognizes the uncertainty as to the meaning of *Embla* but acknowledges 'ash-tree' as the meaning of *askr* and sees the couple as wooden figures: not as treetrunks washed up on the seashore, as Snorri's *Gylfaginning* would lead one to believe (Faulkes 2005, 13), but as unfinished wooden carvings of man-like figures, leavings from the dwarves' workshop. She is not disturbed by any contradiction of their being made of wood with the fact that the dwarves have earlier been described as making these figures out of earth (st. 10); the fact that *Vǫluspá*, as she reads it, presents all vegetation as fundamentally 'of earth' ("av jord," p. 91; *Vǫluspá* sts. 4, 19, 59, 62, cf. 2, as numbered in

Jón Helgason 1962, 1, 5, 14) is sufficient to reassure her that there is no such contradiction.

In the first half of the next stanza, st. 18, Askr and Embla are described in negative terms as lacking certain attributes. They lack *ǫnd* 'breath,' *óðr* 'mind' or 'soul,' *lá* 'vital warmth' or 'blood,' *læti* 'speech, voice,' and *litir góðir* 'good looks.' In the second half-stanza the three Æsir, now named, bestow most of these attributes upon them: Óðinn supplies breath, Hœnir gives mind or soul, and Lóðurr provides vital warmth and good looks. *Læti* 'speech' is not mentioned a second time; Steinsland (1983, 99) believes that this is for metrical reasons. Tryggvi (1984, 87) disregards *læti* altogether, but otherwise mostly agrees with the interpretations of these terms just given; he translates *óðr* as 'thought' (*tanke*). Steinsland also mostly agrees with them (pp. 98–99, cf. p. 80), but differs from Tryggvi in reading the accusative plural *góða* 'good' as *goða*, genitive plural of the noun *goð* 'god,' giving the reading *litu goða*, with accusative plural *litu* governing the genitive *goða*, and the meaning 'the looks of gods, divine features.'

She admits (pp. 81–82) that this reading is questionable on metrical grounds, but finds (p. 87) that it fits well with the two stages in the creation of human beings that the poem is describing: at the first stage, when the humans-to-be are mere man-like figures, they partake of the nature of dwarves; at the second stage, when they have become fully human as a result of the gods' gifts, they partake of the nature of gods. Although Tryggvi (p. 87), who also acknowledges this two-stage process, reads *góða* 'good' here rather than *goða* 'of gods,' he describes the vitality (*livskraft*) bestowed by the gods at the second stage as divine (*guddommelig*).

While finding much to praise in Steinsland's article, Margaret Clunies Ross (1994, 160, 167) is sceptical of her hypothesis that the dwarves create the forms (*mannlíkun*) of the proto-humans Askr and Embla, whom the gods subsequently animate. Lindow (2021, 28), on the other hand, after acknowledging that the 'manlike figures' of st. 10 could be descendants of the first dwarves, writes: "the idea that they are proto-humans makes more sense to me because of what ensues." Neither of them shows awareness of Tryggvi's article, however, in the works cited.

If Steinsland and Tryggvi were indeed writing independently of one another it is a remarkable coincidence that they should both have been working on the same subject – the creation of the first humans as portrayed in *Vǫluspá* – at much the same time. There is no doubt that, as hinted above, Steinsland's argument, with its many valuable observations, supplements Tryggvi's in a number of ways, but there can also be little doubt that Tryggvi's argument, with its claim that what the gods are debating in st. 9 is the creation of humans by the dwarves, is fundamentally the more convincing of the two in paving the way for the appearance of Mótsognir and Durinn in st. 10. This is not to say that his argument is watertight. Jónas and Vésteinn (2014, 106n1) have criticized it on the grounds that no previous mention of dwarves has been made in *Vǫluspá*, and it is true that Tryggvi's argument depends on the dwarves already being in existence when discussed by the gods as candidates for the creation of man. His evident distrust of *Gylfaginning*'s 'maggots' theory is no doubt justified, but his recourse to *Grímnismál* st. 43 and *Alvíssmál* in support of his view that the dwarves existed before the earth's

creation is not altogether persuasive: it is not certain that the making by the dwarves of the ship Skíðblaðnir, narrated in the *Grímnismál* stanza, took place at the very beginnings of mythological time, or whether the dwarf Alvíss's knowledge of *ǫll* […] *røk fira* 'all the history of living beings,' frequently mentioned by Þórr in *Alvíssmál*, is first-hand – quite apart from the question of how far the speakers in these poems, Óðinn as Grímnir and Þórr, are to be trusted. Tryggvi nevertheless offers a coherent view of *Vǫluspá* sts. 9–10, 17–18, that greatly reduces the difficulty of st. 9, lines 5–8, to which Lindow (2021, 28) draws attention, and deserves careful consideration.

Bibliography

Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon. 1989. *Íslensk orðsifjabók* [Icelandic etymological dictionary]. Orðabók Háskólans.

Clunies Ross, Margaret. 1994. *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society. Vol. 1: The Myths*. Odense University Press.

Dronke, Ursula, ed. 1997. *The Poetic Edda: Volume II. Mythological Poems.* Clarendon Press.

Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 2005. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. 2nd ed. Viking Society for Northern Research.

Hermann Pálsson, ed. and transl. 1996. *Vǫluspá: The Sybil´s Prophecy*. Lockharton Press.

Gísli Sigurðsson, ed. 1998. *Eddukvæði*. Mál og menning.

Jón Helgason, ed. 1962. *Eddadigte I: Vǫluspá, Hávamál*. 2nd ed. Nordisk filologi: Tekster og lærebøger til universitetsbrug. Serie A: Tekster 4. bind. Munksgaard.

Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds. 2014. *Eddukvæði I: Goðakvæði*. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Lindow, John. 2021. *Old Norse Mythology.* World Mythology in Theory and Everyday Life. Oxford University Press.

Pettit, Edward, ed. and transl. 2023. *The Poetic Edda: A Dual-Language Edition*. Open Book Publishers.

von See, Klaus, Beatrice La Farge, and Katja Schulz, eds., with the assistance of Simone Horst and Eve Picard. 2019. *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Vol. 1: Götterlieder, pt. 1: Vǫluspá [R]. Hávamál*. Universitätsverlag Winter.

Sigurður Nordal, ed. 1923. *Völuspá gefin út með skýringum* [*Völuspá* edited with commentary]. Supplement to Árbók Háskóla Íslands 1922–23. Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg.

———, ed. 1978. *Vǫluspá*. Translated by B. S. Benedikz and John McKinnell. Durham and St. Andrews Medieval Texts 1. Durham and St. Andrews Medieval Texts.

Steinsland, Gro. 1983. "Antropogonimyten i Vǫluspá: En tekst- og traditionskritisk analyse" [The anthropogony myth in *Vǫluspá*: A textual and tradition-critical analysis]. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 98: 80–107.

Tryggvi Gíslason. 1984. "hverr skyldi dverga dróttir skepia" ['which of the dwarves should create hosts']. In *Festskrift til Ludvig Holm Olsen på hans 70-årsdag den 9. Juni 1984* [Festschrift to Ludvig Holm Olsen on his 70th birthday, 9th June 1984] edited

by Bjarne Fidjestøl, Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen, Finn Hødnebø, Alfred Jakobsen, Hallvard Magerøy, and Magnus Rindal, 84–88. Alvheim & Eide.

FANST DET KVINNELEGE EINHERJUR, OG KVA VAR I TILFELLE DEI MYTOLOGISKE IMPLIKASJONANE?

Else Mundal*

I *Hárbarðsljóð* str. 30 i A-handskriftet (AM 748 I a 4to) av eddadikta er verslinene: *Ek var austr / ok við einherju dœmdak…* lagde i munnen på Odin. Dette er rett nok forma berre i handskriftet AM 748 I a 4to, Codex Regius (R) har forma *einhverja*. At Odin skulle ha vore i aust og tala med ein eller annan, lyder litt tamt og upresist. Når Odin var ute og ferdast, kan vi vente oss ei kvinnehistorie, og *einhverja* er rett nok feminin form, så noko av hokjønn har han tala med også etter teksta i R. Men teksta i A er langt meir presis, og ikkje minst biletskapande, her talar Odin med ei *einherja.* Det kan neppe vere tvil om kva ordet tyder, *einherja* må vere ein feminin parallell til *einheri*, ordet for ein krigar som venta i Valhall for å kjempe på gudane si side i ragnarok. Vi kan ikkje vite kva som har stått i førelegget til R, men om det skulle vere *einherja*, kunne *einhverja* vere ei misforståing som kom av at skrivaren ikkje var kjend med ordet *einherja.* Det kunne i tilfelle tyde på at vi her er ute i dei mindre kjende og sentrale delar av norrøn mytologi.

Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason seier i si utgåve av eddadikta at *einherja* mest truleg er namnet på ei valkyrje (2014, I:394, note).[1] Det er eit logisk forslag. Valkyrjene var krigerske vesen, og difor er det slett ikkje urimeleg at dei kunne bere eit namn som gav assosiasjonar til dei mannlege einherjane. Det er dessutan ei viss overlapping både når det gjeld førestillingar og namn, mellom ulike grupper av mytologiske kvinnelege vesen. Ordet *herja* finst også i det poetiske språket som eit valkyrjeheite (Finnur Jónsson 1912–1915, B I:678).

Men sjølve ordet *einherja* gjev utan tvil klarare assosiasjonar til dei mannlege einherjane enn til valkyrkjene. Difor er det naturleg å stille spørsmålet: Kva no om *einherja,* ikkje berre i den språklege forma, er ein feminin parallell til *einheri*, men er eit kvinneleg vesen som også skal kjempe i ragnarok? Kva slags konsekvensar får det for

* Professor emeritus, Universitetet i Bergen.

[1] Tilvisingar til eddadikt i artikkelen gjeld utgåva til Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason 2014. Omsetjingar frå norrønt er mine eigne.

synet vårt på den siste kampen i ragnarok, og finst det opplysningar eller motiv i andre norrøne mytologiske kjelder som kunne støtte ei slik tolking?

Viktige spørsmål i denne samanhengen er for det første om denne *einherja* i *Hárbarðsljóð* let seg plassere i jotunverda og mellom motstandarane til gudane. Eit anna heilt sentralt spørsmål er om det finst kjelder som gjev argument for at det fanst kvinner i dei hærane som samla seg for å kjempe i ragnarok.

Einherjane er i dei norrøne kjeldene døde krigarar, og dei er plasserte i Valhall der dei kvar dag øver seg for å delta i ragnarok på gudane si side. Den *einherja* som Odin har skjemta seg med, er ikkje i Valhall, ho held til i aust, som er jotnane sitt område. Plasseringa i aust vil ikkje utan vidare utelukke at det er snakk om ei valkyrje, for valkyrjene som reid på hest gjennom lufta, kunne ferdast vide. Men hovudoppgåva deira var trass alt å velje ut dei krigarane frå menneskeverda som skulle falle i strid, og dei ville vere å finne i menneskeverda, ikkje i jotunverda. Når Odin seier at han har vore i aust, er det eit klart hint om at han har vore i jotunverda, og *einherja* burde då vere ei jotunkvinne. At dei kvinner Odin hadde erotiske forhold til, nettopp var jotunkvinner, gjer også at den *einherja* som er nemnd i *Hárbarðsljóð*, passar inn i eit mytisk mønster dersom ho er ei jotunkvinne.

Det neste spørsmålet er så: Finst det støtte i dei norrøne mytologiske kjeldene for at kvinner, som ordet *einherja* kan tyde på, kunne ha ei rolle å spele i ragnarokkampen?

Den viktigaste kjelda til førestillingane om ragnarok er utan tvil *Vǫluspá*. I si prosaframstilling i *Edda,* kapittel 51 i *Gylfaginning*, gjev Snorri ei litt fyldigare og meir utbrodert framstilling, men byggjer i høg grad på *Vǫluspá*, som også er sitert som kjelde. Snorris framstilling av den siste kampen i ragnarok i *Gylfaginning* gjev eit bilete av hærar som samlar seg frå alle kantar under leiing av ein jotun, og ei rad med tvekampar der ein gud kjempar mot ein jotun – Odin mot Fenrisulven, Tor mot Midgardsormen, Frøy mot Surt, Tyr mot helhunden Garm, og Heimdal mot Loke.

Men denne tvekampen med gud mot jotun i ragnarok gjev langt frå heile biletet. Her får vi berre eit glimt av to og to motstandarar i tvekamp, men ragnarokstriden var ein strid som involverte dei store mengdene. Førestillinga om einherjane som skal kjempe på gudane si side i ragnarok, er velkjend frå fleire kjelder. Begge skaldedikta Hákonarmál og Eiríksmál (Finnur Jónsson 1912–1915, B I:57–60, 164–66) gjev eit bilete av einherjane som kjem til Valhall for seinare å kunne kjempe på gudane si side.

Framstillinga i dei norrøne mytologiske kjeldene av Odin og einherjane gjev ikkje inntrykk av at kvinner har noko som helst i dette krigarfellesskapet å gjere. Men eddadiktet *Grímnismál* str. 14 gjev likevel ei interessant opplysning. Diktet seier at halvparten av dei falne krigarane er det Frøya som får. Kvifor Frøya får halvparten av krigarane, og om desse krigarane har ei oppgåve i ragnarok, vert ikkje utbrodert i dei norrøne mytologiske kjeldene. Men det er vel rimeleg å tru at einherjane som tilhøyrer Frøya, skal kjempe på gudane si side akkurat som einherjane som kom til Odin. Spørsmålet er om det har funnest ei førestilling om at Frøya kom til ragnarok som leiar for einherjane sine?

Vǫluspá fokuserer først og fremst på jotunhærar som samlar seg, men på nokre få punkt inneheld Snorris prosatekst detaljar som vi ikkje finn att i *Vǫluspá*, i alle fall ikkje

i den form vi kjenner diktet. Slike detaljar kan vere Snorris tolking, men han kan også byggje på andre kjelder enn *Vǫluspá*. Snorri gjev i *Edda* (*Gylfaginning* kap. 51) ei opplysning om kven Loke kjem i følgje med til ragnarokstriden, som ikkje er i samsvar med teksta i *Vǫluspá* som han siterer som belegg. I *Vǫluspá* styrer Loke skipet til *Muspells lyðir*. Strofa held fram med å seie at alle *fífls megir* (jotunsøner) er i følgje *með freka* (*freki* tyder ulv, og må her stå for Fenrisulven). Her er Loke nemnd igjen som *Býleists bróðir*. Om dei to halvstrofene gjev att to ulike tradisjonar om kven Loke kjem i følgje med til ragnarokslaget og kva retning han kjem frå, eller om dette er å sjå som variantar som utfyller kvarandre, kan kanskje diskuterast. Men Snorri har i si *Edda* ein variant som han har frå ei anna kjelde enn *Vǫluspá*. Han seier at alle innbuarane i Hel kjem saman med Loke. Dette verkar eigentleg ganske logisk sidan Loke er far til Hel, jotunkvinna som herska i dødsriket. Denne opplysninga er også interessant fordi hæren som kjem frå Hel, nødvendigvis må omfatte menneske av begge kjønn – og kanskje vil ha ei overvekt av kvinner sidan dei som fall i strid, kom til Odin i Valhall – eller til Frøya. Her har vi kanskje ei opning for at også kvinner kjempar i ragnarok?

At den førestillinga fanst at dei døde ville kome tilbake når ragnarok kom, har vi belegg for i andre norrøne kjelder. I *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II er der eit kort prosaavsnitt etter strofe 39 som fortel at trælkvinna til Sigrun, Helges kvinne, ein kveld såg at Helge reid til gravhaugen sin saman med mange menn. I den neste strofa stiller ho følgjande spørsmål til Helge:

> Hvárt eru þat svik ein
> er ek sjá þykkjumk,
> eða ragna røk,
> ríða menn dauðir.
> (Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason 2014, II:280)
>
> Er det ei synkverving eg synest sjå, eller ragnarok – døde menn rid.

I denne strofa er samanhengen mellom ragnarok og at dei døde kjem tilbake, tydeleg. Trælkvinna koplar straks synet av dei døde med ragnarok.

Snorris utsegn om at innbyggjarane i dødsriket kjem til ragnarokstriden saman med Loke, har etter mitt syn god støtte i ei anna strofe av *Vǫluspá* enn dei som skildrar jotunhærane som samlar seg, nemleg i verslina *troða halir helveg* (str. 51 i R og 44 i *Hauksbók*, heretter H). Strofa som denne verslina står i, er også sitert av Snorri. Verslina har av dei fleste forskarar vore tolka slik at folk døyr og er på veg til Hel. Men som nettopp vist, så seier Snorri i si *Edda* at Loke kjem til ragnarok saman med alle innbyggjarane i Hel, og *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II seier også at dei døde vil vende tilbake når ragnarok kjem. Om dei *halir* som går Helvegen i *Vǫluspá*, er på veg til Hel, så går dei i alle fall mot straumen, i ei anna retning enn dei andre store skarane som stemner til slagplassen før ragnarokslaget.

No finst det også forskarar som har meint at dei *halir* som *troða helveg* ikkje er på veg til Hel, men at dei kjem frå Hel. Dette er eit syn eg tidlegare har slutta meg til (Mundal

2011). I *Lexikon Poeticum*, under oppslagsordet *halr*, brukar Finnur Jónsson verslina *troða halir helveg* som døme på at *halir* har tyding «menneske» (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 224). I konteksten må det bety at ordet omfattar både kvinner og menn. Finnur Jónsson meiner *halir* i den siterte verslina er dei døde som vender tilbake frå Hel ved ragnarok. At dei *halir* som er nemnde, kjem frå Hel, er også slik Ursula Dronke forstår verslina (1997, 21 og 38), men ho ser ingen samanheng mellom dei *halir* som kjem frå Hel, og dei *halir* som er nemnde i str. 54 i R og 48 i H.

Før Dronke hadde Anne Holtsmark også argumentert for at dei *halir* som *troða helveg* kom frå Hel (Holtsmark 1950, 69 og 72). Holtsmark identifiserer også dei *halir* som kjem frå Hel (str. 51 i R og 44 i H) med dei *halir* som drep dei siste levande i heimen (str. 54 i R og 48 i H). Når diktet seier at *munu halir allir /heimstǫð ryðja,* så tolkar ho det slik at dei døde kjem tilbake frå Hel og går til åtak på dei levande og drep alle. Ho legg vekt på at verbet som er brukt, *ryðja*, er det same verbet som ein brukar for å skildre at krigarar drep heile mannskapet på eit skip. Dei fleste forskarar har tolka strofa slik at alle døyr og forlet verda, men som Holtsmark har peikt på, er dette lite sameineleg med ordlyden i strofa. Tolkinga som går ut på at dei døde går til åtak på dei levande, er derimot i samsvar med førestillingar som finst både i islandsk og norsk folketru. Denne tolkinga får også støtte i sjølve den plasseringa verslinene har i strofa. Verslinene er plasserte – som eit stål – midt inne i kampen mellom Tor og Midgardsormen. Strofa skildrar to kampar som finn stad samstundes: kampen mellom Tor og Midgardsormen og kampen mellom dei levande og daudingane frå Hel.

Både Finnur Jónsson og Anne Holtsmark tolka *halir* som menneske, og i konteksten der ordet er brukt i *Vǫluspá*, må det stå for ein menneskeskare som også omfattar kvinner. Men det er ikkje noko dei framhevar, og kanskje heller ikkje såg som særleg relevant i samanheng med ragnarokstriden. Men verslina *munu halir allir/heimstǫð ryðja*, understrekar – om ein tek teksta bokstaveleg – at alle som kjem frå Hel, er med i kampen mot dei levande, då må det også omfatte kvinnene.

Skildringane av jotunhærane som samlar seg før ragnarok, både i *Vǫluspá* og i Snorris *Edda*, gjev ingen grunn til å tru at jotunkvinner følgjer jotnane – jotunhærane framstår som ei «normal» hærsamling av menn. Men i *Vǫluspá* (str. 51 i R, 44 i H) finst det ei versline, *en gífr hrata*, som kanskje kan vere eigna til i det minste å så tvil om jotunkvinnene var fråverande i ragnarokstriden.[2] *Gífr* er utan tvil eit ord for ei jotunkvinne, men kva det vil seie at dei *hrata* er ope for tolking. Skildringa av jotunkvinnene har gjerne vore sett i samanheng med, og tolka i lys av, skildringa av dvergane som har kome ut og står og støn framfor steinane sine, og verkar skremde. Men det vil vere meir naturleg å sjå jotunkvinnene i samanheng med dei andre som er nemnde i den same strofa. Det er jotunhæren som følgjer Surt, og det er dei døde som

[2] I handskriftene finst både forma *hrata* (H) og *rata* (R). Forma utan *h* i framlyd kan vere ei norsk form av *hrata.* Slike former finst det også ein del av i islandske handskrifter. Utgjevarane av fleire ordbøker har valt å ha begge formene som oppslagsord, noko som kan indikere at dei ser det som mogeleg at formene med og utan *h* kan vere to ulike verb. Om dei to formene skulle vere å oppfatte som to ulike verb, har dei i høg grad samanfallande semantisk innhald, og kan ha vore brukte om kvarandre.

kjem ut frå Hel, og dei er, slik eg vil tolke strofa, begge på veg til ragnarokslaget. Det er eit argument for at det same gjeld jotunkvinnene.

Verbet *hrata* har litt ulike tydingar, og tolkingar og omsetjingar av strofa har tradisjonelt valt ei tyding av verbet som går i retning av «snåve» eller «falle», «streife omkring». Biletet av jotunkvinnene som nærmast ramlar ut av fjella som opnar seg, og vimar rundt, gjev dei ingen imponerande entre, og dei har også vore samanlikna med forvirra husmødrer. Anne Holtsmark seier om jotunkvinnene at dei «holder ellers som andre kvinner til i hjemmet (i berget), men nå ruser fjellveggen ut, og da kommer også gygrene ut» (Holtsmark 1950, 69). Ursula Dronke meiner dei går rundt på leiting etter ein ny bustad no som fjella der dei hadde tilhald, har ramla saman (Dronke 1997, 58), men dette er ei tolking som er utan grunnlag i kjeldene.

Om vi ser på andre tydingar av verbet *hrata* enn dei det vanlegvis har vore peikt på i samband med tolkinga av verslina *en gífr hrata*, så er det mogeleg å gje jotunkvinnene ein langt meir dramatisk og skremmeleg entre som passar betre med biletet av jotunkvinner. Under oppslagsordet *rata* i *Norrøn ordbok* fører Leiv Heggstad opp «fare avstad» og under det same oppslagsordet i *Lexicon Poeticum*, fører Finnur Jónsson opp tydinga «at finde vej». Begge desse tydingane kan passe i konteksten i *Vǫluspá*. Tydinga «fare avstad» gjev eit biletet av handlekraftige og målmedvitne jotunkvinner som skundar seg, i staden for biletet av jotunkvinner som snublar eller fell ut av berget og streifar forvirra rundt. Tydinga «finne veg» understrekar også det målmedvitne; desse jotunkvinnene veit kvar dei skal – dei vil ut av fjella, og ei sannsynleg tolking er at dei, som dei andre som er omtalte i same strofa, er på veg til det komande ragnarokslaget. Skaren av jotunkvinner som strøymer ut av alle fjell, verkar ikkje mindre skremmeleg enn hærane som er leia av ein jotun. Som Terry Gunnell har peikt på (2013, 72), kjem jotunkvinnene inn på scenen med bulder og brak som vert skapt av at *grjótberg gnata* (steinberg ramlar – kanskje som følgje av at jotunkvinnene bryt seg ut?). Dette er ikkje entreen til husmødrer; dette er tvert imot presentasjonen av ein kvinnehær frå jotunheimane. I denne skaren av jotunkvinner kunne kanskje den *einherja* som er nemnd i *Hárbarðsljóð*, passe inn?

Biletet av jotunkvinnene varierer som kjent sterkt i kjeldene, dei kan vere stygge og vakre, fiendslege eller hjelpsame. Biletet av dei varierer ein god del frå genre til genre, men mange er farlege og krigerske. Sjølve ordet *einherja,* som i ei einaste kjelde er brukt om ei kvinne som etter alt å døme held til i jotunverda, gjev klare assosiasjonar til kvinner som kan handtere våpen. Men at jotunkvinner er våpenføre, kjem fram i fleire kjelder. *Skáldskaparmál* i Snorris *Edda* opnar med å fortelje at jotunkvinna Skade kjem til gudane i fullt krigsutstyr, med hjelm og brynje og alle hærvåpen, for å hemne faren som gudane hadde drepe. Det er også mogeleg at jotunkvinnenamn og overlappinga mellom ord for jotunkvinne og våpen er meint å fokusere på den krigerske naturen til jotunkvinner. Namn som Járnsaxa (*sax* er ord for «sverd»), Ǫflugbarða (*barða* er ord for «skjeggøks»), Gnepja (namn både på trollkvinne og øks), Vígglǫð (glad i strid/drap,

namn på trollkvinne og øks), Íma (også ord for «strid») vitnar om at namn på og ord for jotunkvinne gjev assosiasjonar til våpen og strid, og omvendt.[3]

Dei nærbilete vi får av ragnarokkampen i *Vǫluspá* gjev ikkje eit bilete av kjempane kvinner, men slik eg tolkar *Vǫluspá*, er kvinner inkluderte i minst to av dei hærane som samlar seg før ragnarokstriden. Dei må vere inkluderte i flokken av dei *halir* (menneske) som kjem frå Hel, og dei *gífr* som kjem ut frå alle fjell, er ein rein kvinnehær. Skal vi tru at dei berre såg på kampen, var dei til stades for å eggje, eller deltok dei som ordet *einherja*, brukt om ei kvinne frå jotunverda, kan tyde på?

Spørsmålet som er drøfta her, inngår i fleire store problemkompleks i norrøn mytologi. Eit av dei er dødsrikeførestillingane, inkludert kva slags dødsrike kvinnene kom til; eit anna er kvinnerollene både i dette livet og i mytologien, og korleis dei eventuelt kan kaste lys over kvarandre. Desse omfattande problemkompleksa kan ikkje takast opp i ein kort artikkel, men før vi forlet jotunkvinnene og spørsmålet om dei kunne opptre i krigerske (manns)roller, er det ei kjelde som skal nemnast som indirekte viser at mannsroller er opne for jotunkvinner. Denne kjelda er ordet *baugrýgr* som er brukt både i norsk og islandsk lovspråk. *Baugrýgr* er ordet for ei dotter som er einaste barn og som overtek plassen til ein son og skal både ta mot og betale bøter som om ho var ein son. Det interessante i vår samanheng er at ei slik kvinne i menneskeverda er kalla *rýgr*, også andre kvinner med makt og prestisje kunne kallast *rýgr*, men dette er eit ord som også er brukt om «jotunkvinne». Jotunkvinna Skade, som alt er nemnd, var eigentleg ei *baugrýgr* i jotunverda, sjølv om ordet ikkje er brukt om henne, sidan ho var einaste barnet til jotunen Tjatse. For henne var også den mannlege hemnarrolla open – at ho likevel tok mot forlik etter at ho fekk velje seg ektemann mellom gudane, endrar ikkje på det. Det var nok ikkje venta at ei *baugrýgr* i det norrøne samfunnet skulle ta på seg ei hemnarrolle, men i det norrøne samfunnet ser vi at i den heroiske diktinga er dette spørsmålet aktualisert, t.d. i eddadiktet Reginsmál der Reidmar vender seg døtrene for å få dei til å ta ansvar for hemnen etter at sonen Regin har såra han til døden (sjå også Clover 1986 for fleire døme). At ordet *rýgr* i det norrøne språket vert brukt om ei kvinne som kan gå inn i mannsroller og om kvinner med status i hushaldet, fortel oss at førestillingane i den norrøne kulturen var at mannsroller var særleg opne for jotunkvinner. Slik dette ordet for «jotunkvinne» er brukt om kvinner i menneskeverda, vert det eit argument for eksistensen av førestillinga om kvinnelege *einherjur*, i det minste for jotunkvinner i mannsroller.

Når det gjeld dei norrøne kjeldene, og ikkje minst dei mytologiske, så er det eit relevant spørsmål om alt i mytane, og opplysningar om religion og kult, har hatt den same sjansen til å verte formidla i skriftlege kjelder til ettertida. I den munnlege kulturen og diktinga må vi rekne med at kvinner – kanskje i noko varierande grad i ulike munnleg diktgenrar – var med på å skape og tradere den munnlege diktinga. I eit eddadikt skulle vi altså vente meir fokus på kvinner enn t.d. i skaldediktinga som meir er dikting skapt av menn, gjerne av skaldar som høyrde til det aristokratiske krigarmiljøet rundt kongane. Men tekstene kan også ha vorte maskuliniserte når ein skriftleg forfattar

[3] Jotunkvinnenamna som er rekna opp her, finst i «Trǫllkvenna heiti», Finnur Jónsson 1912–1915, B I, 659–60.

brukte den munnlege diktinga som kjelde, og når det gjeld mytologiske tekster, er det også truleg at ein kristen forfattar, medvite eller umedvite, har dempa kvinnelege innslag i teksta under påverknad av den maskuline kristendomen. Om vi ser på Snorris hovudkjelde til ragnarok, *Vǫluspá*, og hans eiga framstilling i *Gylfaginning* kap. 51, så ser vi at det er noko slikt som truleg har skjedd. Einherjane, som eddadiktet ikkje nemner, vert tekne inn i Snorris framstilling, og alle jotunkvinnene som strøymer ut av fjella, vert ikkje nemnde.

Liknande selektive utval frå dei munnlege kjeldene når kjeldene vert brukte av mannlege forfattarar i kristen tid, finn vi truleg på fleire område enn i framstillinga av ragnarok. Anders Hultgård har mellom anna peikt på at norrøn mytologi ikkje gjev noko klart bilete av kvar kvinnene hamna etter døden (Hultgård 2011, 298–301). Snorris framstilling gjev dei neppe andre alternativ enn Hel. Ein slik stad passar dårleg med dei mange staselege og rikt utstyrte kvinnegravene frå heiden tid. Men som Hultgård peikar på med tilvising til *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, har Torgjerd, dotter til Egil Skallagrimsson, tankar om at ho vil kome til Frøya.

At munnleg dikting som kvinner var med på å skape og tradere, fekk mindre fokus på kvinner når denne diktinga vart brukt av mannlege forfattarar, ei er sak. Når ein ser på Snorris *Edda*, så verkar det også sannsynleg at han til ei viss grad har prøvt å redusere indre motsetningar i mytematerialet – som sikkert må ha funnest innanfor det vide Nordiske området – og å skape orden og struktur for å redusere avstanden til den dogmatiske kristendomen. Endeleg vart Snorris hovudsiktemål med *Edda*, å skrive ei lærebok for skaldar, styrande for kva som fekk plass og ikkje. Når vi har Snorris kjelder, som er tilfelle med ein del eddadikt, som *Vǫluspá* og *Hárbarðsljóð*, så er det faktisk å vente at vi kan finne opplysningar og førestillingar som vi ikkje kjenner att hos Snorri, slike kan vi også finne spreidde rundt omkring i andre norrøne tekster. Slike fragment av mytologisk kunnskap som ikkje synest å passe inn i den norrøne mytologien vi kjenner, som den *einherja* som er nemnd i *Hárbarðsljóð*, bør minne oss om at vi ikkje har det heile bilete av den myteverda som ein gong fanst. Men, i beste fall, kan fragmenta gje oss små glimt inn i mytologiske førestillingar som var meir omfattande og varierte enn dei vi kjenner frå Snorris *Edda*.

Bibliografi

Clover, Carol J. 1986. «Maiden Warriors and Other Sons.» *Journal of English and German Philology*, vol. 85, nr. 1: 35–49.

Dronke, Ursula. 1997. *The Poetic Edda: Volume II: Mythological Poems.* Oxford University Press.

Faulkes, Anthony, red. 1988. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning.* Viking Society for Northern Research.

———, red. 1998. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál 1: Introduction, Text and Notes*. Viking Society for Northern Research.

Finnur Jónsson. 1931. *Lexicon Poeticum: Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog.* 2. utgave. Det kongelige nordiske oldskriftselskab.

———, red. 1912–1915. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, A I og II, B I og II. Villadsen og Christensen.

Gunnell, Terry. 2013. «Vǫluspá in Performance.» I *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to* Vǫluspá *and Nordic days of Judgement*, red. Terry Gunnell og Annette Lassen, 63–78. Brepols.

Heggstad, Leiv. 1930. *Gamalnorsk ordbok med nynorsk tyding*, umvølt og auka utgåve av «Gamalnorsk ordbok» ved Hægstad og Torp. Det Norske Samlaget.

Holtsmark, Anne. 1950. *Forelesninger over Vǫluspá, høsten 1949*. [Lectures on *Vǫluspá*, autumn 1959]. Universitetets studentkontor.

Hultgård, Anders. 2011. «Óðinn, Valhǫll and the Einherjar: Eschatological Myth and Ideology in the Late Viking Period.» I *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages*, red. Gro Steinsland, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal og Ian Beuermann, 297–328. Brill.

Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason, red. 2014. *Eddukvæði I–II.* Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Mundal, Else. 2011. «Troða halir helveg.». I *Stanzas of Friendship: Studies in Honour of Tatjana N. Jackson*, red. Natalja Yu, Gvozdetskaja, Irina G. Konovalova, Elena A. Melnikova og Alexandr V. Podossinov, 276–83. Dmitriy Pozharskiy University.

VALKYRIES PROPAGATING, PROPAGATING VALKYRIES: A MYTHOLOGICAL FEEDBACK LOOP

Luke John Murphy*

The valkyries have long fascinated scholarly and popular audiences in the modern Western world, myself included. In 2013, I submitted a lengthy MA thesis developed under the ægis of Terry Gunnell on the *valkyrjur* at the University of Iceland (Murphy 2013). Since then, I have revised parts of that thesis on other topics (Murphy 2022) and revisited the *valkyrjur* in various academic settings, but I never found the right time to write up my evolving ideas more fully. Over a decade later, this Festschrift for Terry, an inspiring, supportive, and critically-constructive mentor, seems the ideal venue. This study thus attempts to unite several trains of thought concerning the *valkyrjur* I have explored over the last dozen or so years, some securely grounded in the available source material, others more speculative.

This short study cannot review all the rich source material on the *valkyrjur*. Suffice it to say that the data is varied, and has led to many interpretations of the way(s) in which these variably-supranatural feminine figures were understood by the Iron Age societies that created them (Damico 1984; Price 2002; Egeler 2011; Näsström 2016; Quinn 2020). For this investigation, I will risk rationalisation to draw on a broad range of evidence for the *valkyrjur* (Murphy 2013, 43–44), and wish to highlight the apparent contradictions that characterise them: they are at once beautiful and dangerous, described as "mey […] hvíta, haddbjarta" ('a girl, fair, blonde-haired;' *Hrafnsmál*, 91) but bearing names like Geir-Róta ('spear-disorder;' Whaley 2012, 279), Herfjǫtur ('army/war fetter,' i.e. that which restrains an army or its actions; *Heiti valkyrja*, 968; *Grímnismál* 36, *Eddukvæði*, 1:375), Kára ('storm;' *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* pr., *Eddukvæði*, 2:283) and so on.[1] Similarly, they simultaneously "kjósa feigð á menn ok ráða sigri" ('chose fates for men and govern victory;' Faulkes 2005, 30) and "bera einherjum ǫl" ('carry ale to the

* The Danish Technological Institute.

[1] All translations are my own.

einherjar;' *Grímnismál* 36, *Eddukvæði*, 1:375; *cf. Eiríksmál*, 1003). These dichotomies might originate in the complex source-critical issues of the extant texts. However, I believe it more likely that these contradictions were central to the role played by *valkyrjur* within the mythology of the Iron-Age warrior aristocracy, and were deliberately maintained and exploited to project masculine, martial social structures from human society onto a divine community that also served as an afterlife for (at least some) Iron Age warriors.

The Valhöll Complex

While the *valkyrjur* of our sources appear in settings from the mythological glory of Óðinn's hall to the very human world of legendary heroes, their appearances in the latter seem predicated on the understanding that the individuals in question are examples of a broader category of beings with a primary mansion in Valhöll. Let us therefore examine the role the *valkyrjur* played in this mythological setting.

The imagined divine/afterlife community of Valhöll was clearly a reflection of the human society that created, maintained, and propagated it in their myths and rituals. The masculine, martial concerns of these myths have long been recognised, and the bulk of the community they describe consisted of warriors, the *einherjar* – who, according to a range of sources (e.g. *Grímnismál* 8, *Eddukvæði*, 1:369; Faulkes 2005, 33) had to have participated in at least one battle to gain entry to the community of Valhöll (the name compounds *valr* ['battle-slain'] and *hǫll* ['hall, elite residence']). This community is ruled by Óðinn, both king of the gods and god of kings. Even the material setting of this community is extreme, almost caricatured, with the very substance of the hall reflecting the martial obsession of its inhabitants – spears for rafters, shields for roof tiles, byrnies for blankets (*Grímnismál* 9, *Eddukvæði*, 1:369–70).

Notably, the Valhöll complex reflects the lives of human warriors in the Nordic Iron Age. The members of the divine/afterlife comitatus that the *einherjar* formed for Óðinn seem to have 'lived' an idealised version of the aristocratic warrior lifestyle they enjoyed (or aspired to) before death. Indeed, the two primary pursuits of the *einherjar* mirror those of the aristocratic warrior elite whose mythology propagated them: feasting and fighting.

What we might call 'human' feasting was a fundamental part of Nordic Iron Age culture. Feasts did not simply provide caloric intake, but were social arenas where important displays of power could be projected, relationships negotiated, and social roles defined (Ceolin 2022). This was particularly true of aristocratic warriors, whose participation in politico-religious feasts featuring a greater abundance of high-status foodstuffs like meat and alcohol distinguished them from the rest of the population and bound them into strict mutual obligations (Enright 1996; Herschend 1997; Hem Eriksen 2019). In contrast even to the highest level of human society, feasting in Valhöll was not an occasional event, but a daily reality, where the meat of the mythological pig Sæhrímnir would never run out (Faulkes 2005, 32), presumably in contrast to some human feasts where less-favoured members of the group would have had to fill up on vegetables and bread. Alcohol was also abundant, with the mythological goat Heiðrún

providing endless mead (Faulkes 2005, 33). As with the food, there is enough that there is no risk of running short, presumably reflecting real-life experiences of expensive wine, mead, or high-quality beer being reserved for the inner circle, while lesser-status warriors had to make do with poor-quality beer or fermented milk products (Guerrero Rodriguez 2007).

Note that the *einherjar* take no part in the procurement or production of these foodstuffs, in contrast to the lived human experience of how costly feasts for visiting magnates would have been (Brink 1996). Similar ideas might be seen in localised underground afterlives in the Nordic Iron Age, some of which also included idealised feasting of dead groups of men in hall-like structures, as in the thirteenth-century account of the afterlife beneath the holy mountain Helgafell in *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þorðarson 1935, 19; Fig. 1). Other echoes of the Valhöll complex could be traced in the microcosmic halls, many complete with military accoutrement, in the chamber graves from e.g. tenth-century Birka (Arbman 1940), or, most speculatively, in the fiery light from Logafjall whence *valkyrjur* ride in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 15 (*Eddukvæði*, 2:249–50).

Figure 1. Helgafell, seen from the north-west. Photo by author, 2013.

Moving from feasting to fighting, *einherjar* could feast all night and fight all day – literally. Snorri claims they only needed to "ganga út í garðinn" ('step out into the yard;' Faulkes 2005, 34) to begin fighting. Human warriors in the Iron Age would have frequently been required to undergo significant hardships to actually make it to the battlefield: they would have left property and dependents back home, travelled significant distances (perhaps sailing overseas) while enduring uncertain supply lines, the vagaries of the Nordic climate, and all the risks of hostile locals before they would even have had a chance at a stand-up fight – which, even if they had won, could have left them wounded, captured, lost, or suffering any number of negative consequences short of death itself. In contrast, the *einherjar* found their battles right outside their door, and like their consequence-free feasting, this violence had no repercussions. Where the winners of human violence could have risked vengeance, feud, or obligations to pay

compensation, Snorri calls the *einherjar*'s bloodshed "leikr" ('entertainment, game'), and has them home safely each evening, like children making it home in time for tea in an Enid Blyton adventure. *Vafþrúðnismál* 41 goes further still, suggesting that daily violence actually strengthened social bonds, like a mythological team-building paintball tournament: "val þeir kjósa / ok ríða vígi frá / sitja meirr um sáttir saman" ('They chose the dead and ride from the battle, sit all the more at peace together;' *Eddukvæði*, 1:363).

In sum, I argue that the Valhöll complex represents an idealised aristocratic warrior lifestyle projected by a human martial subculture highly concerned with its own mortality onto the afterlife.

It must be acknowledged that this idealised image of a mythological location, especially as a postmortem destination, is fertile ground for medieval Christian ideologies to influence our source material. Just as the Valhöll complex presents an idealised aristocratic hall, Snorri's Hel is a twisted inversion of the same setting: in contrast to the abundance of Sæhrímnir and Heiðrún, Hel's hall has a dish called "hungr" ('hunger'), a knife called "sultr" ('famine'), and so on (Faulkes 2005, 127). These details are allegorical, meant to stress the unpleasant nature of an afterlife spent with Hel. As Christopher Abram has established, Snorri seems to have taken a relatively free hand with his source material in this context (Abram 2006).

Should we then dismiss the idealised Valhöll complex as a medieval construction by Snorri, akin to his Hel? I would argue not: while Snorri adjusted Hel to fit his Christian worldview, he also drew on genuine pre-Christian traditions, likely including Náströnd ('Corpse-Beach'), as described in *Vǫluspá* 36–37. The eddic poem describes a hall for dead men who broke society's taboos or committed crimes, a deliberate reversal of a desirable cosmological mansion. Náströnd is "sólu fjarri" ('far from the sun') and literally faces the wrong way – "norðr horfa dyrr" ('[its] doors face northwards')[2] – and is built of ghastly materials that drop poison inside: "fellu eitrdropar inn um ljóra, sá er undinn salr orma hryggjum" ('drops of poison fall in at the smoke-hole, that is a hall woven of serpents' spines;' *Eddukvæði*, 1:300). The symbolic depiction of Náströnd as an afterlife for criminals suggests allegorical thinking in syncretic or pre-Christian conceptions of afterlives during the late Iron Age (*cf.* Males 2013). Moreover, evidence for Valhöll as a warrior's paradise – explicitly in *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál* and implicitly in other texts like *Eyrbyggja saga* – strongly suggests that the Valhöll complex was known to aristocratic warriors in the Nordic Iron Age.

Valkyrjur in the Valhöll Complex

One aspect of the Valhöll (after)lifestyle conspicuously absent – at least to modern eyes – is sex. The twenty-first-century idea of the 'Viking warrior' might focus on three of the 'four F' evolutionary behaviours: feasting, fighting, and procreating. Yet sources are suspiciously quiet on the sex lives of the *einherjar*. Michael Enright's model of the aristocratic communities that inspired the Valhöll complex left space for only one

[2] Doors in the main buildings of Scandinavian farmsteads typically faced southwards to take advantage of the available sunlight, particularly in the north of the region.

woman in the elite hall: the wife of the ruling magnate, the Lady with the Mead Cup, whose sexual desirability and unavailability to the warriors was a powerful tool of control for the magnate (1996). However, historical warriors likely had a range of official and unofficial sexual relationships with other women in their social circles. Might the *valkyrjur* have been the mythological equivalents of these other women, Othered into supranaturality?

Our source material would not appear to support such a reading. Although largely silent on the proclivities of the *einherjar*, several sources clarify that *valkyrjur* in mythological settings did not lead active sex lives. This is not to say that the *valkyrjur* were never understood as women – they could be, though not always fully human. The terminology for *valkyrjur* often refers to younger, unmarried women, and their beauty is one of the few explicitly described features in our sources. The named *valkyrjur* of the heroic eddic poems – Sigrún, Sváva, and Brynhildr – married human heroes, and we can assume a sexual relationship was understood by Iron Age audiences. However, different ideas about *valkyric* sexuality seem to apply in the mythological setting of the Valhöll complex.

One explicit motif appears in the prose framing of the eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál*. Acting as a battlefield psychopomp, Sigrdrífa became enamoured with the man Óðinn had destined to lose and join the *einherjar*, granting him victory and life against Óðinn's orders. For this, Óðinn declares that she "aldri skyldu síðan sigr vega í orrostu ok kvað hana giptask skyldu" ('should never afterwards rule victory in battle, and said that she should marry;' *Sigrdrífumál* pr., *Eddukvæði*, 2:314). This draws a firm line between *valkyrja*-hood and the life of an eligible woman. Although this framing is younger than the poetry, similar motifs appear in other texts, where married heroic *valkyrjur* were generally more valkyric before marriage. Indeed, after his death, the still-active hero Helgi *Hundingsbani* refuses to engage in sexual relations with his ex-*valkyrja* bride Sigrún, despite her making a bed in his burial chamber and attempting to initiate intimacy before he removes his blood-soaked wargear (*Eddukvæði*, 2:281). The only source that in any way suggests a sexual relationship between the *valkyrjur* and *einherjar*, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 38, does so only as part of an exchange of absurd insults between two warriors (*Eddukvæði*, 2:254). The exaggerated tenor of this flyting makes it clear, at least in my mind, that the idea of *einherjar* coming to blows over a *valkyrja* in Valhöll was not understood literally by the poem's audience.

Overall, I see no evidence suggesting that the role of the *valkyrjur* in the Valhöll complex was ever considered sexual. Scholars of pre-Christian religion generally agree on this point. Andreas Nordberg (2004, 195–97) has proposed that the *valkyrjur* in Valhöll fulfilled roles similar to those of family members in human halls: daughters, nieces, sisters. This explains the absence of sexual activity between the highly-gendered groups and the ease with which heroic *valkyrjur* blend into the aristocratic human population of the eddic poems, unlike other supernatural feminine collectives like the *dísir* and *nornir*. Nordberg's suggestion might apply to some localised expressions of aristocratic warrior culture. However, I do not believe that historical aristocratic warriors would have found it unacceptable for their peers to pursue each other's female relatives sexually. Members

of Iron Age comitatuses were the social elite, which might have raised concerns about 'unsuitable' pairings between different social classes. However, this society valued personal deeds and reputation highly, and allowed (some) social mobility for competent, loyal warriors from less elevated backgrounds. For these men, their social status depended on repeatedly proving their physical prowess, which was threatened by injury, illness, or age, but which could have been supported by creating additional bonds with fellow elite warriors, such as via blood brotherhood – or marriage to a female relative.

I therefore find it unlikely that the *valkyrjur* of the idealised Valhöll complex would have been widely understood as the sexually unavailable female peers of the *einherjar*. Just as the *einherjar*'s other physical needs were met without mention of cooks, cobblers, launderers, or armourers, there was likely a tacit understanding in aristocratic Iron Age warrior culture that non-male, non-aristocratic members of society were represented in Valhöll either by supernatural forces (like Heiðrún's ability to produce alcohol without human intervention) or by unmentioned actors unworthy of attention in the male aristocratic fantasy that Valhöll was. In this way, the very prominence of the *valkyrjur* sets them apart as special, not merely part of the supporting case of the proto-*einherjars*' self-aggrandising wish fulfilment, but as something more important. I would therefore like here to propose an alternative role, or purpose, of the *valkyrjur* in the Valhöll complex, one rooted in the projection of masculine, martial social structures from human society into the divine/afterlife community as a form of control.

My point of departure is the nature of Valhöll as a *selective* afterlife. Not everyone who died in the Iron Age could expect to gain access to Óðinn's hall, only men who identified as warriors – and not even all of them. There seem to have been multiple competing traditions during the late pagan era, so depending on the sources consulted, it seems that the *einherjar* were selected from among those humans who had died bloody, violent deaths, pleasing Óðinn (or his *valkyrjur*) in some way prior to, or potentially just in the manner of, their deaths.[3] *Gylfaginning*, for example, remarks that:

> Margr kemr sá til Valhallar er dýrt mundi þykkjask kaupa vazdrykkinn ef eigi væri betra fagnaðar þangat at vitja, sá er áðr þolir sár ok sviða til banas.
> (Faulkes 2005, 33)
>
> Many come to Valhöll, who would consider a drink of water dearly bought if no better welcome could be gotten, one who had previously suffered wounds and agony until he died [lit. 'suffered to death'].

Thus the *einherjar* were simultaneously fundamentally similar to the aristocratic warriors who told aspirational stories about them, and a different thing entirely, existing on a mythological plane and interacting with gods and supranatural beings. For a man to undergo a transition from the state of 'human warrior' to '*einheri*' was thus a significant change, one marked by the extreme violence of its transition. A productive

[3] The relationship between the Óðinnic *einherjar* and the "hálfan val" ('half the battle-dead') chosen by Freyja to join her in Fólkvangr is unclear (*Grímnismal* 14, 1:370).

tool for the study of such changes in social status is Arnold van Gennep's *rites de passage*. Originally developed to model changes in the social status of living humans such as a boy becoming a socially-defined man, or a single woman becoming a married one, the *rites de passage* chart how an initiand undergoes separation from their old position in society, a liminal phase where they play no role, and finally incorporation into their new social role (van Gennep 1960).

In my opinion, this also perfectly describes the changes undergone by a hypothetical Iron Age warrior during the course of becoming an *einheri*. At the start of the process, the warrior is physically and socially powerful, defined by his very ability to stand in a dangerous melee and project political might on behalf of their magnate. His status as a professional warrior (in as much as such a thing existed in the Nordic Iron Age) is indicated by his weapons and armour. Yet the process of becoming a member of the *einherjar* requires that he be defeated physically, losing his ability to stand in a shield wall or to project political might. In most cases it would have also included the literal loss of his weapons, of which he would have lost hold during death. In this perimortem moment, a warrior would not have been able to play his socially-acceptable role in society, and the only role available to him, that of casualty, would have made him a liability to his social group, risking their physical and political status. In the society of the Valhöll complex, however, the moment of death is a temporary one. The dead warrior is transported to Valhöll, where he incorporates back into aristocratic warrior society, taking up weapons in a different (superior) hall on behalf of a different (superior) magnate as an *einheri* (Fig. 2).

Yet, like initiands undergoing a *rite de passage*, the warrior/*einheri* is not alone in this violent transition – they are helped along by an initiator. I argue that this role was played by the *valkyrjur*, who, in the mythological world of the Valhöll complex, form a perfect mirror of the warrior/*einheri,* undergoing an inverted form of the man's transition. For all their name stresses the role of a *val-kyrja* as 'chooser of the battle-dead,' the default role of the *valkyrjur* in the Valhöll complex is as celestial barmaids, nameless servants of the *einherjar*, seemingly powerless within Valhöll. Only when Óðinn deploys them to human settings do the *valkyrjur* act as battlefield psychopomps, deciding matters of life and death between warriors, clearly exercising power and high social status. In the liminal battlefield setting, the warrior falls and loses his weapons, symbols of his power, which the *valkyrja* appropriates, taking his place as the decision-maker and bearer of martial paraphernalia. There may have been an understanding of a literal physical inversion, as the warrior – usually taller and stronger than a female figure, even a supernatural one – falls to the ground and is towered over by a *valkyrja* on horseback (possibly flying onto the scene, if *HHI* is to be believed). Yet this state is not permanent: when the man completes his death, the *valkyrja* oversees his transport to and integration into the Valhöll complex as an *einheri*. The man returns to his high status, and the *valkyrja* gives up her weapons, horse, and power, returning to her passive role as a celestial barmaid (Fig. 3).

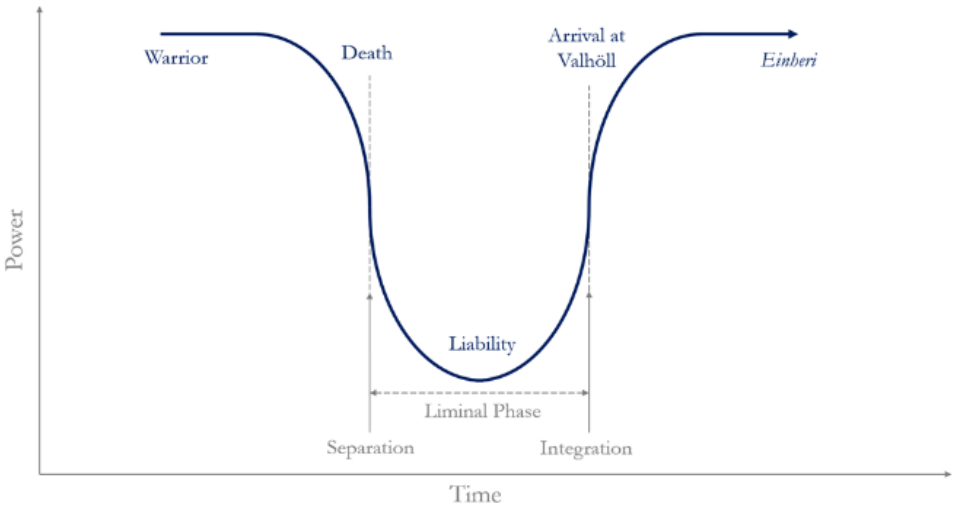


Figure 2. A schematic overview of the *rites de passage* undergone by a dying aristocratic warrior during their transition to *einheri*.

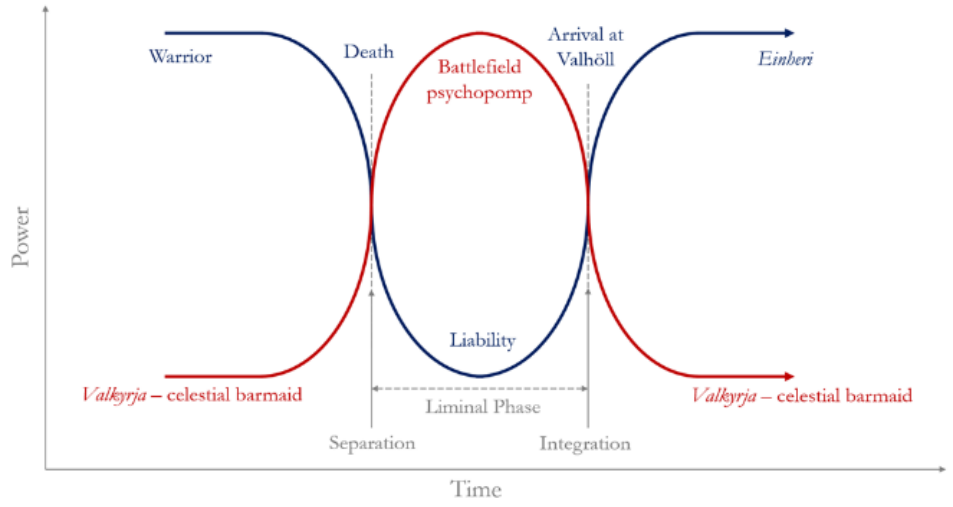


Figure 3. The inversion undergone by the *valkyrja* as initiator during the death and subsequent incorporation of an aristocratic warrior overlaid on Fig. 2.

I believe this proposed schema represents a productive (if somewhat rationalised) reading of the available source material on the Valhöll complex. Identifying the *valkyrja* as an initiator draws on the developments of van Gennep's work by subsequent scholars, particularly Victor Turner (1969). Turner's work has been applied to pre-Christian Nordic mythologies before, notably by Jens Peter Schjødt, who noted the mediating role of some individual *valkyrjur* in other contexts (notably Sigrdrífa; 2008,

297) without exploring their potential role as initiators. I believe Turner also provided an explanation for why the *valkyrjur* were portrayed in such a transgressive, discomforting manner: "[c]ognitively, nothing underlines regularity so well as absurdity or paradox. Emotionally, nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behaviour" (Turner 1969, 176). After all, the authority exercised by the *valkyrjur* as battlefield psychopomps fundamentally opposes the gender norms and social structures of the aristocratic segment of the Nordic Iron Age population that produced and propagated the Valhöll complex (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2020).

This temporary inversion of social power is safely contained within a brief liminal moment, and thus however much it might have discomforted Iron Age aristocratic warriors, fails to truly challenge their cultural dominance. Rather, its fleeting nature reinforces the dominance of 'normal' statuses – male figures as powerful, non-male as impotent – in exactly the same way as carnival and carnivalesque phenomena subvert social norms only within permitted periods (Baktin 1984). Speaking of the classical Μαινάδες, or *maenads* (with whom the *valkyrjur* exhibit a surprising number of parallels), the classicist Park McGinty said that such myths "allowed for the temporary suspension of rules but *only by legitimating that suspension in terms of more fundamental rules which upheld clearly defined power relationships*" (McGinty 1978, 93; emphasis mine).

Thus far I have argued that the *valkyrjur* play a prominent role in the surviving mythology of the Valhöll complex (at least as we access it via extant sources) due to their role in promoting pro-social behaviour within the warrior aristocracy of the Nordic late Iron Age, propagating the dominant social order by normalising it through a form of 'exceptions proving the rule.' (I accept that this function would likely not have been readily apparent to members of that social order, who, if they considered the 'function' of any elements of their mythology, would have ascribed a range of insider perspectives to these figures.) I must stress that my position is based on a somewhat rationalised reading of the available evidence, some of it very late, and as such I make no claim that it accurately reflects the *valkyrja*-discourse of all Iron Age aristocratic warrior groups – I do, however, believe it likely reflects the dominant discourse across individual articulations of this culture.

Valkyrjur beyond the Valhöll Complex

If we accept that the Valhöll complex mythological system was, at least in part, concerned with propagating a specific social order in aspirational mythological settings, it is also relevant to examine how the system itself was propagated outside of these contexts. Let us therefore turn from the *valkyrjur* as mythology to the *valkyrjur* as lived religion (af Edholm et al. 2019), and examine how they and the social order they supported were created, used, and propagated within late Iron Age society. Significant scholarship exists on how mythological material interacted with living humans in this period – Terry Gunnell himself reinvigorated the academic study of myths as lived dramatic performances (1995). At least some of the Iron Age population would thus

have been able to 'meet' *valkyrjur* alongside other mythological beings in human spaces during the performance of 'ritual dramas,' as well as through interaction with material representations of them in iconography, such as on silver jewellery (Gardeła, Pentz, and Price 2022; *cf*. Price 2006). Textual sources also depict some mythological figures with distant mansions appearing more directly in human spaces, such as the conflations of pre-Christian deities with their wooden idols (Taggart 2019; Sottotetti 2022), or the many legendary accounts of Óðinn personally interfering in human warfare. The *valkyrjur*, of course, were even more associated with appearances on human battlefields, and I wish to argue here that they and the mythological system of which they were a fundamental part – the Valhöll complex – were actively propagated by their perceived appearances in such places during the Nordic Iron Age.

The cognitive science of religion argues that religious thought is a byproduct of how the human brain processes information (Atran and Henrich 2010). Belief in supranatural beings in particular has been linked to 'agency detection,' or the human brain's ability to detect external beings in the data it processes. This ability has, in evolutionary terms, kept our species alive by allowing us to detect potential predators in our environment. However, our brains tend towards overactivity rather than underactivity: false positives, such as pareidolia (the phenomenon where we identify faces or animals in abstract shapes), are, at worst, momentarily surprising. They have a negligible cost on an evolutionary scale. On the other hand, false negatives, where we fail to spot an agent in our surroundings, could have a deadly cost for individuals and a cumulative effect on the species if the overlooked agent were predatory. Recent scholarship no longer claims that "hyperactive agency detection" is the origin of religion, but prefers to argue that the two phenomena are mutually constitutive (van Elk et al. 2016).

Studies have generally shown that the detection of so-called 'inhuman agency' is based on two variables. The first is the observer's pre-existing belief in inhuman agents (Barnes and Gibson 2013; Riekki et al. 2014; van Elk 2013). A 2017 study found that 'priming' subjects to expect supranatural encounters in particular circumstances had a greater impact on the triggering of inhuman agency detection than the subject's sensory reliability – in this case, subjecting them to the same test in either daylight or a dark mist (Andersen 2017). That said, there is also a significant body of scholarship suggesting that dangerous or uncertain circumstances can increase inhuman agency detection: although not all studies unambiguously support this position (Maij et al. 2017), there is evidence that isolation increases the anthropomorphism of perceived agencies (Epley et al, 2008), that the perceived predictability of detected agencies is lower under dangerous circumstances (Waytz, Cacioppo, and Epley 2010), and that sensations of awe can induce belief in supranatural agents (Valdesolo and Graham 2014). Reductions in a subject's ability to act freely also appear to increase inhuman agency detection (Andersen 2017, 14).

In short, you are more likely to believe you have encountered a *valkyrja* if you have already been primed to believe *valkyrjur* exist. We cannot say for certain how widespread the belief in the literal existence of *valkyrjur* was in the Nordic Iron Age, but we do know that personal beliefs depend on culturally-inculcated religious ideas. Thus,

people in the Iron Age were more likely to believe they had direct experience of *valkyrjur* if they had been exposed to aristocratic warrior culture, particularly its mythology, which stressed the fickleness of Óðinn and his psychopomps. This effect would likely be reinforced in matching contexts: if you were primed to believe that *valkyrjur* were more likely to interact with humans in specific contexts – such as a battlefield – then you are more likely to interpret false positives in agency detection if you were on a battlefield when your ability was triggered.

This is compounded by the fact that an Iron Age battlefield is a fundamentally dangerous setting that would have restricted one's ability to objectively analyse the source of ambiguous sensory stimuli triggering their agency detection mechanisms. A non-exhaustive list of battlefield causes of ambiguous sensory stimuli across history includes pain or blood loss from wounds, adrenaline crash or general exhaustion following combat, shock, panic, or grief from violence inflicted on oneself or one's social group, and, considering the battlefield as the culmination of a longer period of suboptimal conditions (such as those undergone by warriors on campaign or on Viking expeditions), exposure, malnourishment, or dehydration. Famous historical examples of supranatural encounters in battlefield conditions include the alleged ætiology of the Danish flag (which supposedly fell from the sky during the Battle of Lyndanisse in 1209; Lindholm and Nicolle 2007), and the British sightings of ghostly bowmen and angels in the trenches of World War I (Clarke 2002).

There need not be a specific cause to a perceived supranatural encounter – a pareidolic Jesus could appear on your toast at any time – inhuman agency detection can also be triggered by related sensory stimuli, such as mistaking a child for a leprechaun. In this context, I believe that evidence for the presence of human women on or near Iron Age battlefields, particularly in the immediate aftermath of battles, would have significantly contributed to the likelihood of warriors who had been primed with Valhöll complex discourse experiencing valkyric encounters. While Iron Age battlefields could be dismissed as traditionally masculine spaces where men performed their social roles as warriors, but both archaeological and textual sources also associate women with large-scale military violence.

Despite the "military and political bias" of Old English and continental Latin chronicles (Jesch 1991, 103), several sources on Viking raids indicate that Nordic forces included women. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* details the capture of women and children from a Viking fortification at Benfleet in 894 AD (Bately 1986, 86; Whitelock et al. 1961, 55), and Regino of Prüm's account of the occupation of Angers in 873 AD mentions "wives and children" (Kurze 1890, 105–7; MacLean 2009, 168). Abbo Cernuus' *Bella Parisiacae urbis*, a mostly-reliable eyewitness account of the Viking raids on Paris in 885 and 887 AD (Jesch 1991), describes "Danish" women baking bread, treating wounds, mourning deaths, and berating malingerers (Dass 2007, 35, 83–85). Classical texts also describe similar behaviours: Strabo notes the "priestesses" with the Cimbri in the second century BC executed prisoners and beat drums during battles (Jones 1924, 3:169–71), and Tacitus describes Germanic women near battlefields offering moral and medical support (Koestermann 1961, 173; Wellesley 1964, 216; Bruun and Lund 1974, 42; Rives 2002, 80).

Significant archaeological evidence supports these descriptions. The ninth-century 'Great Viking Army' left evidence of women in camps and cemeteries: textile-production equipment at Torksey Winter camp (872–873 AD; Hadley and Richards 2016, 54–55); female bones in the Repton Winter camp mass grave (873–874 AD; Jarman et al. 2018); and multiple burials at Heath Wood (ca. 873–878 AD) identified as "camp followers, wives or slaves" (Richards et al. 2004, 105). In Denmark, a population revisited a first-century AD battle site to systematically clear the battlefield by collecting weapons, equipment, and body parts (including four pelvises threaded on a stick) and depositing them in a local wetland, aligning with Nordic religious practices (Holst et al. 2018; Lund 2019). The number and sex of the remains (at least 380 mostly young individuals, "predominantly or exclusively male") could suggest women were responsible for these processes (Holst et al. 2018, 5925).

In sum, there is evidence to suggest that Iron Age Nordic women were not entirely absent from battlefields, but likely attended (some) conflicts to offer moral support and medical treatment to the warriors of their side, as well as having related responsibilities involving the post-battle treatment of the wounded and dead. Some may even have attended battlefields explicitly for that reason, hovering in the wings to deal with the dying like a fourth beast of battle. I do not believe that there is sufficient evidence to prove that *valkyrjur* originated entirely in such encounters, although the similarity of their behaviour to scavenger birds in such a scenario, and their confirmed associations with ravens both directly in *Hrafnsmál* and indirectly via Óðinn in a range of texts, make me suspect they had an avian aetiology. I would, however, firmly argue that warriors primed with the aspirational afterlife of the Valhöll complex were more likely to interpret ambiguous sensory stimuli as valkyric encounters if such encounters were, in part, based on triggers such as glimpses of women haranguing men on the battlefield, or carrying away wounded or dying combatants – particularly if those women were already Othered foreigners from the opposing side of the conflict, and thus wearing unusual clothes, speaking unknown languages, or acting in unfamiliar ways. Of course, not every 'valkyric encounter' would have led the subject to actively spread the word of their experience, or to propagate the mythology of the Valhöll complex – it is entirely possible to imagine a warrior who believed he had encountered a *valkyrja* but *not* been 'chosen' to join the *einherjar* would be reluctant to discuss his experience. Similarly, not every valkyric encounter need have been taken literally. It would be entirely possible for a warrior to draw on existing cultural discourse about the *valkyrjur* to describe an encounter with women he knew to be entirely human, just as Florence Nightingale was dubbed the 'Angel of Crimea' in terms of the mythological discourse of supranatural beings dominant during the Crimean War in the mid-nineteenth century.

Conclusion

The evidence I have examined in this study falls into two broad categories: evidence for the aristocratic warrior elite constructing mythological reflections of real-world social structures to propagate their own ideals, and evidence for how those aristocratic

warriors might have reacted to the presence and actions of human women on the periphery of their battles in the late Iron Age. The conclusion I draw from the synthesis of these two corpora is that, like the other parts of the Valhöll complex, late pagan *valkyrjur* (at least as they appear in the varied extant sources considered here) were reflections of a real-world social phenomenon. I believe that the *valkyrjur* helped propagate the ideas and social structures of the aristocratic warrior culture that created and used the Valhöll complex mythology, while they themselves were (at least in part) propagated by encounters that were much more likely among populations that subscribed – or had at least undergone significant exposure to – that same mythology. In short, the *valkyrjur* helped propagate the Valhöll complex, and were in turn propagated by this system, forming a mythological feedback loop in Iron-Age warrior aristocracy.

Acknowledgements

The length of this study's germination means that I cannot claim sole credit for any positive contributions it might make: Terry Gunnell greatly influenced my initial thesis, Simon Nygaard explored some of these ideas with me in a co-written 2018 conference paper in Uppsala, and my thoughts have benefited from critical discussions on the topic with Frog, Jörgen Magnusson, and Merrill Kaplan, as well as participants of several conferences and seminars over the years.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bately, Janet M, ed. 1986. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, Vol. 3: MS. A*. D. S. Brewer.

Bruun, Niels W., and Allan A. Lund, eds. 1974. Publius Cornelius Tacitus. *De origine et situ Germanorum*. Wormianum.

Dass, Nirmal, ed. and transl. 2007. Abbo. *Viking Attacks on Paris: The Bella Parisiacae Urbis of Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés*. Peeters.

Eddukvæði = Jónas Kristjánsson, and Vésteinn Ólason, eds. 2014. *Eddukvæði*. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þorðarson, eds. 1935. *Eyrbyggja saga*. Íslenzk fornrit 4. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Eiríksmál = Fulk, Robert D., ed. 2012. "Eiríksmál." In *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, edited by Diana Whaley, 1003. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1. Brepols.

Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 2005. Snorri Sturluson. *Gylfaginning*. 2nd ed. Viking Society for Northern Research.

Heiti valkyrja = Gurevich, Elena, ed. 2017. "Heiti valkyrja." In *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, edited by Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold, 968. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3. Brepols.

Hrafnsmál = Fulk, Robert D., ed. 2012. "Þorbjǫrn hornklofi, *Haraldskvæði* (*Hrafnsmál*)." In *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, edited by Diana Whaley, 91. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1. Brepols.

Jones, Horace Leonard, ed. and transl., and John Robert Sitlington Sterrett, transl. 1924. Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*. 8 vols. Loeb Classical Library 49, 50, 182, 196, 211, 223, 241, 267. William Heinmann.

Koestermann, Erich. 1961. Publius Cornelius Tacitus. *The Histories of Tacitus – P. Cornelii Taciti libri qui supersunt*. Teubner.

Kurze, Friedrich, ed. 1890. Regino of Prüm. *Reginonis abbatis prumiensis chronicon cum continuatione treverensi*. MGH SS Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum Separatim Editi 50. Hannoverae.

MacLean, Simon, transl. 2009. Regino of Prüm. *History and Politics in Late Carolingian and Ottonian Europe: The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg*. The Chronicle of Regino of Prüm and Adalbert of Magdeburg. Manchester University Press.

Rives, J. B., transl. 2002. *Germania*. Clarendon Press.

Wellesley, Kenneth, transl. 1964. *Tacitus, The Histories: A New Translation*. Penguin Books.

Whaley, Diana, ed. 2012. "Einarr *skálaglamm* Helgason, *Hákonardrápa*." In *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, edited by Diana Whaley, 279. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1. Brepols.

Whitelock, Dorothy, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, eds. 1961. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*. Eyre and Spottiswoode.

Secondary Sources

Abram, Christopher. 2006. "Hel in Early Norse Poetry." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2: 1–29.

Andersen, Marc. 2017. "Predictive Coding in Agency Detection." *Religion, Brain & Behaviour* 9, no. 1: 65–84, DOI: 10.1080/2153599X.2017.1387170.

Arbman, Holger. 1940. *Birka. Untersuchungen und Studien. Die Gräber. Text*. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien.

Atran, Scott, and Joseph Henrich. 2010. "The Evolution of Religion: How Cognitive By-Products, Adaptive Learning Heuristics, Ritual Displays, and Group Competition Generate Deep Commitments to Prosocial Religions." *Biological Theory* 5, no. 1: 18–30, DOI: 10.1162/BIOT_a_00018.

Barnes, Kirsten, and Nicholas J. S. Gibson. 2013. "Supernatural Agency: Individual Difference Predictors and Situational Correlates." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 23, no. 1: 42–62, DOI: 10.1080/10508619.2013.739066.

Brink, Stefan. 1996. "Political and Social Structures in Early Scandinavia: A Settlement-Historical Pre-Study of the Central Place." *Tor* 28: 235–81.

Ceolin, Martina. 2022. "The Practice of Feasting in Medieval Iceland." In *Food Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Viktória Gyönki and Andrea Maraschi, 223–40. Amsterdam University Press, DOI: 10.1515/9789048540235.

Clarke, David. 2002. "Rumours of Angels: A Legend of the First World War." *Folklore* 113, no. 2: 151–73.

Damico, Helen. 1984. *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*. The University of Wisconsin Press.

af Edholm, Peter Jackson, Andreas Nordberg, Olof Sundqvist, and Torun Zachrisson, eds. 2019. *Myth, Materiality, and Lived Religion in Merovingian and Viking Scandinavia*. Stockholm University Press.

Egeler, Matthias. 2011. *Walküren, Bodbs, Sirenen: Gedanken zur religionsgeschichtlichen Anbindung Nordwesteuropas an den mediterranen Raum*. De Gruyter.

van Elk, Michiel. 2013. "Paranormal Believers Are More Prone to Illusory Agency Detection than Skeptics." *Consciousness and Cognition* 22, no. 3: 1041–46, DOI: 10.1016/j.concog.2013.07.004.

van Elk, Michiel, Bastiaan T. Rutjens, Joop van der Pligt, and Frenk van Harreveld. 2016. "Priming of Supernatural Agent Concepts and Agency Detection." *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 6, no. 1: 4–33, DOI: 10.1080/2153599X.2014.933444.

Enright, Michael. 1996. *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Téne to the Viking Age*. Four Courts Press.

Epley, Nicholas, Scott Akalis, Adam Waytz, and John T. Cacioppo. 2008. "Creating Social Connection Through Inferential Reproduction: Loneliness and Perceived Agency in Gadgets, Gods, and Greyhounds." *Psychological Science* 19, no. 2: 114–20, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02056.x.

Gardeła, Leszek, Peter Pentz, and Neil Price. 2022. "Revisiting the 'Valkyries:' Armed Females in Viking Age Figurative Metalwork." *Current Swedish Archaeology* 30: 95–151, DOI: 10.37718/CSA.2022.10.

van Gennep, Arnold. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika B Vizedom and Gabrielle L Caffee. Routledge.

Guerrero Rodriguez, Jesús Fernando. 2007. "Old Norse Drinking Culture." PhD Thesis, University of York.

Gunnell, Terry. 1995. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Boydell & Brewer.

Hadley, Dawn M, and Julian D Richards. 2016. "The Winter Camp of the Viking Great Army, AD 872–3, Torksey, Lincolnshire." *The Antiquaries Journal* 96: 23–67, DOI: 10.1017/S0003581516000718.

Hem Eriksen, Marianne. 2019. *Architecture, Society, and Ritual in Viking Age Scandinavia: Doors, Dwellings, and Domestic Space*. Cambridge University Press.

Herschend, Frands. 1997. *Livet i hallen* [Life in the hall]. Occasional Papers in Archaeology 14. Reklam & Katalogtryck.

Holst, Kähler, Jan Heinemeier, Ejvind Hertz, Peter Jensen, Mette Løvschal, Lone Mollerup, Bent Vad Odgaard, Jesper Olsen, Neils Emil Søe, and Søren Munch Kristiansen. 2018. "Direct Evidence of a Large Northern European Roman Period

Martial Event and Postbattle Corpse Manipulation." *PNAS* 115, no. 23: 5920–25, DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1721372115.

Jarman, Catrine, Martin Biddle, Tom Higham, and Christopher Bronk Ramsey. 2018. "The Viking Great Army in England: New Dates from the Repton Charnel." *Antiquity* 92, no. 361: 183–99, DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2017.196.

Jesch, Judith. 1991. *Women in the Viking Age*. The Boydell Press.

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir. 2020. *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World*. Bloomsbury.

Lindholm, David, and David Nicolle. 2007. *The Scandinavian Baltic Crusades 1100–1500*. Osprey Publishing.

Lund, Julie. 2019. "Alken Enge som rituel plads: Deponeringer i lyset af fragmentering, skelettering og dannelse af en ny rituel plads" [Alken Enge as ritual space: Deposits in the light of fragmentation, skeletonisation and formation of a new ritual space]. In *De dræbte krigere i Alken Enge: Efterkrigstidsritualer i ældre jernalder* [The slain warriors in Alken Enge: Post-war rituals in the Early Iron Age], edited by Mette Løvschal, Mads Kähler Holst, and Rasmus Birch Iversen, 209–26. Jysk Arkæologisk Selskab.

Maij, David L. R., Hein T. van Schie, and Michiel van Elk. 2017. "The Boundary Conditions of the Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device: An Empirical Investigation of Agency Detection in Threatening Situations." *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 9, no. 1: 23–51, DOI: 10.1080/2153599X.2017.1362662.

Males, Mikael. 2013. "Allegory in Old Norse Secular Literature: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 9: 99–132.

McGinty, Park. 1978. "Dionysos's Revenge and the Validation of the Hellenic World-View." *Harvard Theological Review* 71, no. 1–2: 77–94, DOI: 10.1017/S001781600002558X.

Murphy, Luke John. 2013. "*Herjans dísir*: *Valkyrjur*, Supernatural Femininities, and Elite Warrior Culture in the Late Pre-Christian Iron Age." MA Thesis, University of Iceland http://hdl.handle.net/1946/15652.

———. 2022. "Distinguishing Discourses of the Dísir." *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74: 317–40 https://tidsskrift.dk/rvt/article/view/132109.

Nordberg, Andreas. 2004. *Krigarna i Odins sal: Dödsföreställningar och krigarkult i fornnordisk religion* [The warriors in Óðinn's hall: Death concepts and warrior cult in Old Norse religion]. 2nd ed. Akademitryck AB.

Price, Neil S. 2002. *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. The Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University.

———. 2006. "What's in a Name? An Archaeological Identity Crisis for the Norse Gods (and Some of Their Friends)." In *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions. An International Conference in Lund, Sweden, June 3–7, 2004*, edited by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere, 179–83. Vägar till Midgård 8. Nordic Academic Press.

Quinn, Judy. 2020. "Valkyries." In *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures*, edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén. Vol. 3. Pre-Christian Religions of the North. Brepols, DOI: 10.1484/M.PCRN-EB.5.112891.

Richards, Julian D, Pauline Beswick, Julie Bond, Marcus Jecock, Jacqueline McKinley, Stephen Rowland, and Fay Worley. 2004. "Excavations at the Viking Barrow Cemetery at Heath Wood, Ingleby, Derbyshire." *The Antiquaries Journal* 84: 23–117, DOI: 10.1017/S0003581500045819.

Riekki, Tapani, Marjaana Lindeman, and Tuukka T. Raij. 2014. "Supernatural Believers Attribute More Intentions to Random Movement than Skeptics: An fMRI Study." *Social Neuroscience* 9, no. 4: 400–11, DOI: 10.1080/17470919.2014.906366.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2008. *Initiation Between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*. University Press of Southern Denmark.

Sottotetti, Giorgia. 2022. "From the Temple to Your Pocket: The Roles, Types, and Contexts of Idols in Nordic Paganism, 400–1100 AD." MA Thesis, University of Iceland.

Taggart, Declan. 2019. "Do Thor and Odin Have Bodies? Superperception and Divine Intervention among the Old Norse Gods." *Religions* 10, no. 8, DOI: 10.3390/rel10080468.

Turner, Victor W. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine Publishing Company.

Valdesolo, Piercarlo, and Jesse Graham. 2014. "Awe, Uncertainty, and Agency Detection." *Psychological Science* 25, no. 1: 170–78, DOI: 10.1177/0956797613501884.

Waytz, Adam, John Cacioppo, and Nicholas Epley. 2010. "Who Sees Human?: The Stability and Importance of Individual Differences in Anthropomorphism." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, no. 3: 219–32, DOI: 10.1177/1745691610369336.

SPITTLE-MAN AND THE TALKING HEAD: HOSTAGES, BOUNDARIES, AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE PEACE SETTLEMENT OF THE *ÆSIR* AND *VANIR*

John Lindow*

The joining of the *æsir* and *vanir* comprises one of the important liminal moments in Old Norse mythology.[1] Where before there had been two groups,[2] now there is one, and although there remain hierarchical and functional distinctions between the groups, the unmarked terms *æsir* and *goð* henceforth apparently denote members of both of the two old groups, now members of the one new group.

Table 1 shows the motifs that comprise the myth and their distribution in the sources, with the various hostage exchanges broken out because they comprise the subject of this paper. Although the exchange of Njǫrðr to the *vanir* has the most widespread textual support and is definitely worthy of attention, in what follows I pay special attention to Kvasir and Mímir and seek to clarify the transformations they undergo.[3] Indeed, I will argue that these transformations can be linked to cosmogony and that the entire myth of the peace settlement might be viewed in that context.

* Professor emeritus of Old Norse and Folklore, University of California, Berkeley.

[1] A version of this paper was presented in 2010 in Reykjavík at a conference on "Gods on the Edge," organized by Terry Gunnell, who was the only one in the audience who chuckled audibly at the image of the Talking Heads on the title slide.

[2] I remain unconvinced by the 'obituary' of the *vanir* (Simek 2010); see Schjødt 2014 and further Lindow 2021.

[3] In what follows I ignore the variation in the form of the name (Mímir/Mímr/Mími) and stick with Mímir, the form found in the story of the exchange of hostages in *Ynglinga saga*. See further Kuusela 2017 for an attempt at interpretation of all the relevant information.

Table 1.

Motif	**Source(s)**
There was a war between the *æsir* and v*anir*	*Vǫluspá* 24, *Skáldskaparmál*, *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 4
The two groups convened a formal meeting to make peace	*Skáldskaparmál*, *Ynglinga saga,* ch. 4
Hostage exchange Njǫrðr to the *æsir*	*Vafþrúðnismál* 39, *Lokasenna* 36, *Gylfaginning*
Hostage exchange Hœnir to the *vanir*	*Gylfaginning* (in exchange for Njǫrðr), *Ynglinga saga,* ch. 4
Hostage exchange Freyr to the *æsir*	*Ynglinga saga,* ch. 4
Hostage exchange Mímir to the v*anir*	*Ynglinga saga,* ch. 4
Hostage exchange Kvasir to the *æsir*	*Ynglinga saga,* ch. 4
The two groups mixed their spittle in a kettle	*Skáldskaparmál*
To retain the token of the truce (*griðamark*), from the mixed spittle the gods made Kvasir	*Skáldskaparmál*

I think we can agree that there was first a war between the two groups, the one the seeress in *Vǫluspá* called "folkvíg/fyrst í heimi" (*Vǫluspá* 21K/26H), since when she refers to battles between the *æsir* and *vanir* three stanzas later she calls that conflict "enn folkvíg/fyrst í heimi" (24K) or "fyrr í heimi" (29H).[4] In her commentary to *Vǫluspá*, Ursula Dronke drew attention to the nearly complete lack of information in skaldic verse about the war itself (1997, 129), and this is a point I would emphasize: where the peace process and its aftermath are a rich source of kennings, the war itself was apparently necessary only as the excuse for the peace process. As Dumézil (1973, 3–25 and other publications) emphasized, this is a foundation myth of incorporation.

Snorri certainly conceived of the process as beginning with a formal meeting between the 2 groups; he is consistent in his use of the term *stefna*. In *Skáldskaparmál,* Bragi tells Ægir:

> Þat váru upphǫf till þess at guðin hǫfðu ósætt við þat fólk er Vanir heita, en þeir lǫgðu með sér friðstefnu ok settu grið á þá lund at þeir gengu hvárirtveggju til eins kers ok spýttu í hráka sínum.
> (Faulkes 1998, 3)

> The origin of it was that the gods had a dispute with the people called Vanir, and they appointed a peace-conference and made a truce by this procedure, that both sides went up to a vat and spat their spittle into it.
> (Faulkes 1995, 61)

[4] Although the variation "fyrst"/"fyrr" opens up various interpretive possibilities, the editors of the *Eddakommentar* come to the conclusion that both variants refer twice to one and the same conflict. They understand the wording in H to mean: "Das war noch der[selbe] Krieg/[wie] früher in der Welt" (von See, La Farge, and Schulz 2019, 1525).

Ynglinga saga has it thus:

> En er þat leiddisk hvárumtveggjum, lǫgðu þeir milli sín sættarstefnu ok gerðu frið ok seldusk gíslar.
> (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941, 12)

> And when both wearied of that, they agreed on a peace meeting and concluded a peace, giving each other hostages.
> (Hollander 1964, 8)

Thinking topographically, we might say that two groups that stood facing each other across a battlefield now enter the liminal space of a formal meeting place, a space that belongs to neither group. This topographical conception echoed the real-life configuration of space, in which *þing* sites were best placed at the boundaries of districts, that is, in liminal places; and the polyvalence of the word *stefna*, with connotations of legal summoning and specially set passages of time, also helps point to the ritual nature of what is to transpire.

Snorri does not directly name those who preside over the ritual; they are simply the collectives of the *æsir* and *vanir*. Those who are named are named because they play roles given to them by their collectives. Of these, I would like to begin with the Kvasir of *Skáldskaparmál*, since Einarr *skálaglamm*'s use of the kenning *Kvasis dreyra* for poetry in *Vellekla* puts the myth of spittle-Kvasir in the court of Hákon jarl in the second half of the tenth century. This Kvasir literally incorporates the divine co-mingling, for he is made from the spittle of both groups.

Some time after they spit in the vat, the *stefna* comes to an end.

> En at skilnaði þá tóku goðin ok vildu eigi láta týnask þat griðamark ok skǫpuðu þar ór mann. Sá hét Kvasir. …
> (Faulkes 1998, 3)

> But when they dispersed, the gods kept this symbol of truce and decided not to let it be wasted, and out of it made a man. His name was Kvasir. …
> (Faulkes 1995, 61–62)

Who made him? Since the incorporation has now been achieved, Snorri's use of the word *goð* could be the simple unmarked term for both groups, but because it occurs when the two groups part ("at skilnaði"), we might incline to the view that it is the original *æsir* at work here; and furthermore the story is about the origin of the mead of poetry, an Óðinnic tool if there ever was one. If so, then the hierarchical status of the two groups may be echoed: only the original *æsir* can create. However, the situation is complicated by the obvious parallel to the animation of Askr and Embla, the first human beings. In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri situates this creative act directly within the first generation of the old *æsir*, in Óðinn and his brothers, but *Vǫluspá* 18KH conjoins Óðinn with Hœnir, another *áss* and—or perhaps I should say but—one of the hostages sent to the *vanir* as part of the settlement, and the even more mysterious Lóðurr. I am not one who finds the arguments linking Lóðurr and Loki compelling, but since we do not know who Lóðurr

might have been, and since Hœnir's status is complicated by the very myth we are looking at now, we must leave open the proposition that endowing with life is purely the right of the original *æsir*.

In any case, this Kvasir is neither *áss* nor *vanr*, but rather both. We see this neither-both equation clearly in the textual tradition. On the one hand, the domain of the spittle-Kvasir of *Skáldskaparmál* relates clearly to the sphere of Óðinn: He travels widely throughout the world, imparting *frœði*, and apparently engaging in question and answer sequences. Bragi tells Ægir:

> Sá heitir Kvasir. Hann er svá vitr at engi spyrr hann þeira hluta er eigi kann hann órlausn. Hann fór víða um heim at kenna mǫnnum frœði. …
> (Faulkes 1998, 3)
>
> His name was Kvasir, he was so wise that no one could ask him any questions to which he did not know the answer. He traveled widely through the world teaching people knowledge. …
> (Faulkes 1995, 62)

Characteristic of spittle-Kvasir is his constant changing: first blended spittle in a kettle, then a man, then blood in kettles mixed with honey, finally divine mead of poetic inspiration. Furthermore, these transformations join with the crossing of boundaries: from the *stefna* of the warring gods, to the dwarfs, to the *jǫtnar*, finally to the gods, with a bit of himself diverted to mankind to be used by those who write the lyrics to pop songs. Besides these travels across the horizontal world of the mythology, spittle-Kvasir/poetic mead also goes vertically down into a mountain and up into the air, and he moves from a population with no women—the dwarfs—to the care of a woman and finally, through a mating of male and female, to the gods. It is quite a journey, and an appropriate one for the most potent symbol in the mythology and, I suspect, in the intellectual lives of pre-Christian poets.

I turn now to hostages, that is, to persons "held as a security for the fulfillment of certain terms" (Morris 1969, 637). Of those set forth in *Ynglinga saga*, only Njǫrðr is mentioned as a hostage in the poetic tradition. The two relevant passages, *Vafþrúðnismál* 38–39 and *Lokasenna* 34–35, agree that Njǫrðr was a hostage, although both pose textual challenges, and only *Vafþrúðnismál* explicitly associates this role with an exchange between the *æsir* and *vanir*.

In *Vafþrúðnismál*, Óðinn asks Vafþrúðnir about Njǫrðr:

38	Óðinn kvað:	*Odin said:*
	"…hvaðan Njǫrðr um kom með Ása sonum —hofum ok hǫrgum hann ræðr hunnmǫrgum— ok varðat hann ásum alinn."	'…from where Niord came to the sons of the Æsir; he rules over very many temples and sanctuaries and he was not raised among the Æsir.'

39	Vafþrúðnir kvað:	*Vafthrudnir said:*
	"Í Vanaheimi skópu hann vís regin ok seldu at gíslingu goðum; í aldar røk hann mun aptr koma heim með vísum vǫnum." (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 362–63)	'In Vanaheim the wise Powers made him and gave him as hostage to the gods; at the doom of men he will come back home among the wise Vanir.' (Larrington 2014, 46)

The return of Njǫrðr to the *vanir* at the end of the world ("aldar røk") requires comment. Obviously the dissolution of all bonds accompanies the end of the world, as the ending of *Vǫluspá* makes perfectly clear, but in this case what is predicted is the undoing of the peace settlement that joined the *æsir* and *vanir*. If we read Njǫrðr's status in the mythological present as liminal because it is between his Vanic past and his Vanic future, what we might call the age of Óðinn look precarious indeed. From this perspective, the entire mythological present is but a limen, where the narrative pauses but does not rest.

Njǫrðr's marriage to Skaði, with her man's armor, masculine grammatical-gender name, and choice of Njǫrðr through the application of her gaze—otherwise always coded as masculine—clearly bends and worries gender boundaries. It is not difficult to see this bending as associated with the permanent status of hostage, that is, of one belonging somehow at once to both of two groups. *Lokasenna* 34 shows that whatever else he might have been, the home truth was that Njǫrðr was a hostage. Njǫrðr has just called Loki an "áss ragr" who has born children. Loki responds:

'Þegi þú Njǫrðr! þú vart austr heðan *gísl* um send at goðum;[5] Hymis meyjar hǫfðu þik at hlandtrogi ok þér í munn migu.' (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 415)	'Be silent, Niord, you were sent from here eastwards as hostage to the gods; the daughters of Hymir used you as a pisspot and pissed in your mouth.' (Larrington 2014, 86)

This passage offers numerous interpretive difficulties concerning who sent Njǫrðr and where exactly he went (von See et al. 1997, 452–55). However, the differing possibilities are immaterial from a structural perspective: Njǫrðr moved from place to place, from group to group. As a hostage, Njǫrðr remains forever betwixt and between, and this

[5] Manuscript *gils* at the beginning of this line is clearly metathesis of *gísl*, 'hostage' (von See et al. 1997, 454), as the use of *gísl* in the repeated line in the following stanza shows.

status shows in his entire story. The rest of the hostage exchanges we know only from *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 4.

> Fengu Vanir sína ina ágæztu menn, Njǫrð inn auðga ok son hans, Frey, en Æsir þar í mót þann, er Hœnir hét, ok kǫlluðu hann allvel til hǫfðingja fallinn. Hann var mikill maðr ok inn vænsti. Með honum sendu Æsir þann, er Mímir hét, inn vitrasti maðr, en Vanir fengu þar í mót þann, er spakastr var í þeira flokki. Sá hét Kvasir. (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941, 12)
>
> The Vanir gave their most outstanding man, Njorth the Wealthy and his son Frey; but the Æsir, in their turn, furnished one whose name was Hœnir, declaring him to be well fitted to be a chieftain. He was a large man and exceedingly handsome. Together with him the Æsir sent one called Mímir, a very wise man; and the Vanir in return sent one who was the cleverest among them. His name was Kvasir. (Hollander 1964, 8)

The imbalance in numbers may appear curious: three *vanir* to the *æsir* (Njǫrðr, Freyr, and Kvasir, now not a spittle-man but the wisest of the *vanir*), but only two *æsir* to the *vanir* (Hœnir and Mímir). Perhaps we have no right to expect symmetry of numbers here, but it is certainly possible that the imbalance reflects the hierarchical superiority of the *æsir*. Furthermore, it is important to recall that this version of the settlement is not about the incorporation of two groups; it is simply about the cessation of hostilities. Therefore the only *vanir* who can join the *æsir* are those who come as hostages. Since Freyr is to be of particular importance in Sweden, Snorri had to make him a hostage.

Given that spittle-Kvasir is an artifact not of a cessation of hostilities but of a profitable joining of two groups, there is no place for him in *Ynglinga saga*. And then there is the fact that *Heimskringla* is what we might call history, or to put it another way, it is a medieval author's euhemerized presentation of immigration into the North. In *Ynglinga saga*, the figures presented as gods by the tricky Asiamenn (*Snorra Edda* Prologue)/*æsir* in *Gylfaginning* or the euhemerized pre-Christian poet Bragi in *Skáldskaparmál* are actors in world history. The mythological figure created from spittle, the traveler imparting wisdom who morphs into mead, is here in *Ynglinga saga* simply "spakastr í þeira flokki." Where spittle-Kvasir was associated with *frœði*—cosmic knowledge—, *vana*-Kvasir is merely "spakr," that is, he may have some human skills at prophecy.

If the events of the early chapters of *Ynglinga saga* are meant to be plausible, and I am convinced that they are, what are we to make of Mímir's talking head? Snorri offers perfectly clear motivation for the beheading of Mímir: the *vanir* suspect that they have been cheated in the exchange of hostages. Since Mímir advised Hœnir with his voice, which issued from the mouth in the head, sending the head without the body may make a certain kind of sense. This return is unique among the hostages, although it corresponds to some degree with the peregrinations of spittle-Kvasir. However, if we view it in light of the return of Njǫrðr to the *vanir* at the end of the world, it might be possible to speculate that the return of Mímir's head could constitute a threat of the end of the world. If so, Óðinn's treatment of the head counters the threat.

Some years ago, I speculated on Mímir's head as a kind of "pagan relic" or a possible reflection of a shaman's mask, in line with Snorri's presentation of Óðinn as a plausible

Sámi shaman (Lindow 2003, 96–97, 103). I still hold open both possibilities, but before going on I must treat a third. *Ynglinga saga* goes on to recount what Óðinn did with Mímir's severed head:

> Óðinn tók hǫfuðit ok smuði urtum þeim, er eigi mátti fúna. …
> (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941, 13)
>
> Óthin took it and embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot. …
> (Hollander 1964, 8)

The closest verbal parallel in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus (spotted even by nineteenth-century observers such as Johan Fritzner [1973, 450]) occurs early in the Hauksbók redaction of *Breta sögur*.[6]

> Eneas let jarða lik Pallas með miklum veg ok let smyria með ivrtvm sva at eigi matti fvna.
> (Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892–1896, 236–37)
>
> Eneas had the corpse of Pallas buried with great honour and had it smeared with herbs so that it would not rot.

Only with the publication of Hélène Tétrel's edition of the other manuscripts of *Breta sögur* has it become clear that the details of the Hauksbók version of the preservation of Pallas's corpse comprise an outlier. In the two other manuscripts that contain this section, the text is thus:[7]

> Pallas uar lagdr i steinþro ok sett ker a briost honum fullt af balsamo. Vpp or kerinu uoru .ij. eirpipur i nasar likinu ok nadi bukrinn eigi at funa. …
> (Tétrel 2021, 406)
>
> Pallas was interred in a stone coffin with a container filled with balsam on his chest. Two brass tubes ran up from the container into the dead man's nostrils and the body was unable to rot. …

The apparent reason for preserving the body in *Breta sögur* was revealed, we read, during the days of Sigurðr Jórsalafari: when excavation was begun for a building in Rome, the body of Pallas was found on a stone throne proclaiming his identity, uncorrupted and intact except for an enormous wound. William of Malmesbury has this discovery in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, and it also appears much later in the *Gesta Romanorum*, but the precise textual relationships still remain to be worked out.

More relevant to *Breta sögur* is that Theodoricus has the episode in his *Historia de*

[6] This material is not from the translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Brittaniae* but rather from the portion before it, covering the matter of the last six books of the *Aeneid*, on the war between the Trojans and the Italians. See further Tétrel 2010.

[7] Tétrel's edition generally follows AM 573 4to A and does so here. The other relevant manuscript, KB Isl. Papp. 58, varies slightly and has plural containers for the balsam.

Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium and uses the method with nasal tubes,[8] which implies that this method was a dominant motif in Nordic historiography of the twelfth and thirteenth century. This finding makes the Hauksbók text an even greater outlier.

This discussion is quite relevant because Snorri probably was influenced by *Breta sögur*. Anthony Faulkes pointed out one name form that tantalizingly connects the Prologue to *Snorra Edda* with *Breta sögur* (Faulkes 1978–79; 1993, 63), and the way *Ynglinga saga* moves summarily from king to king may reflect *Breta sögur* (Würth 1998, 73). Furthermore, Snorri was certainly involved in what Würth (1998, 187–226) calls the cultural prerequisites ("kulturelle Voraussetzungen") for the translation and reception of the pseudo-historical sagas in Iceland. More generally, as a continuation of *Trójumanna saga*, *Breta sögur* connects to the Troy story and thus to Snorri's euhemeristic project, as it is set forth in both *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*. It is certainly not impossible that Snorri knew the lost translation that underlies all of the extant versions of *Breta sögur*. However, whether that version contained the anointing of the head of Pallas is unknowable, and therefore this parallel cannot be added to the dossier of Mímir with any certainty. And even if it could be added, it lacks the *galdr* that Óðinn sang over the head after he embalmed it—not to mention that the head of Pallas is attached to the body and does not speak.

Still, the act of smearing a head to preserve it deserves scrutiny. Let us note here first that *smyrja*/*smyrva* puts us directly into the vocabulary of ritual, though not of course pre-Christian ritual. It is the verb used when kings are anointed or when other men are elevated to high office, and it is the verb used when the dying receive extreme unction. Both situations are liminal, with a status change to king or chieftain in the first and to dead in the second. A medieval audience might construe anointing an already dead person as a pre-Christian inversion of Christian ritual, but it might also notice that it is precisely the head of Mímir that is anointed, as were the heads of kings. In this light, smearing herbs on the head of Mímir could certainly connote a mythological advancement to some new high status. And as is the case so often with Snorri, there is perhaps also a joke here. Hœnir has the status of a chieftain in Vanaland, although Mímir makes all the decisions. In death Mímir's head gets a portion of the medieval ritual to make him king.

Both spittle-Kvasir and Mímir's head begin among the *æsir*. Each then travels to another group and meets death. Thereafter, each is processed to become a more valuable product. The body parts processed are different—blood and head—but the end result in both cases is a wisdom tool. The narratives differ insofar as the story of spittle-Kvasir becomes a travel and acquisition story, but the story of Mímir's head could hardly be so in the context of *Ynglinga saga*, since the chapters in which it is located are focused

[8] "Inuentum est etiam uas argenteum, locatum super pectus eius, in quo confectio myrrhe erat et balsami pretiosissima, indeque egrediebantur duo calami aurei, quorum summitates naribus infigebantur, ut uidelicet uirtute unguenti corpus non minus interius quam exterius duraret incorruptum." ('There was also found placed upon his breast a silver vessel containing a very costly preparation of myrrh and balsam; from it emerged two gold reeds whose tips were inserted into his nostrils, presumably so that through the power of this ointment the interior parts should remain no less uncorrupted than the exterior') (Kraggerud 2018, 68–71).

around the itinerary of the emigration from Asia, and Óðinn does not himself divert from this itinerary. Spittle-Kvasir has from the very beginning elements of both the *æsir* and *vanir*, whereas Mímir only acquires his Vanic elements from having been a silent leader among them. Nevertheless, both figures have elements of both groups.

A person versed in all manner of *frœði* is always handy to have around, as is someone who can actually make decisions and is willing to do so without taking the credit for them. Nevertheless, the inspirational beverage and the talking head are more useful than the beings they emerged from, and from this we must conclude that the transformation of each was a highly creative and positive act.

Through their deaths and the processing of certain of their body parts, Kvasir and Mímir most resemble Ymir, who also died in (or at least at the hands of) a group that was not his own, namely the *æsir*, and underwent a transformation of his body parts into something far more useful than he himself had been. His role in the principal cosmogonic narrative is more complex than those of spittle-Kvasir and head-Mímir in the *æsir-vanir* story, and this complexity is in part revealed in his hermaphroditic conception but also, more prosaically, in that more of his body parts get used: blood, flesh, and bones are common to *Grímnismál* and *Gylfaginning*, with the additions of hair, skull, and teeth in one or the other. I wish to argue that these body parts are processed, in a parallel to the fermenting of spittle-Kvasir's blood and the oil and herb preservation of head-Mímir. The processing in question would have been familiar to anyone: the slaughtering of animals. Mostly, of course, we think of the food that results from such processing, and it itself could be used in different ways in the pre-modern North: meat, sausage, blood soup or blood pudding, and so forth. But there is more than food: people also got such products as skins for clothing and shelter, or bone to fashion into useful objects. More than the flesh is at issue, just as is the case with the creation of the cosmos from various parts of Ymir's dead body.

If there is anything to this equation of Ymir, Kvasir, and Mímir through transformative processing, with slaughtering in the case of Ymir, it may make sense that he was nourished by Auðhumla, the very first livestock animal in the mythic curve. Like a calf, Ymir drinks her milk directly, without a farmer's intervention. Bor, on the other hand, stands outside the implicit species relationship joining cow and *jǫtunn*.

Table 2.

	Group	**Killed by**	**Part(s) used**	**Process**	**Result**
Ymir	*jǫtnar*	*æsir*	flesh, blood, bones, hair, skull, teeth	slaughter	cosmos
Mímir	*æsir*	*vanir*	head	curing	wisdom
Kvasir	*goð*/*vanir*	dwarfs	blood	fermentation	poetry

Table 2 shows the relationships I propose among the three characters. The columns on the right hand side summarize what I have just been saying, although I have chosen "curing" rather than "smearing" or "anointing" to emphasize that I understand the transformation of Mímir's head as the result of a positive process. The second column

on the left shows that there is one processed body each from the *jǫtnar*, the *æsir*, and the collective of *æsir* and *vanir*, which I have indicated with *goð* (following *Skáldskaparmál*) as a term that neutralizes the opposition of *æsir* and *vanir*; if we follow *Ynglinga saga*, on the other hand, the groups would be *jǫtnar*, *æsir*, and *vanir*. Both divine groups, the *æsir* and *vanir*, contribute what in this context is a useful killing, and in this they are joined by their allies in creative activity, the dwarfs.

Although the slaughtering of an animal for food may be straightforward, the notion of transforming it into food by cooking formed one of the central binaries of structuralist thought in the last century, and I do not think we should be prepared just yet to abandon the distinction between raw and cooked. If we follow Lévi-Strauss (1969) here, we must read the killings of spittle-Kvasir and of Mímir as offering up the raw material for the processing undertaken by Óðinn and the *æsir* to reclassify them as "cooked:" as belonging to culture and to order, as weapons to be used in the fight against the forces of chaos.

Both Kvasir and Mímir cross boundaries, and disruptive crossings of boundaries characterize the mythic prehistory that brought together the *æsir* and the *vanir* into a single group. The arrival of three female *jǫtnar* from outside signals the end of the golden age, and the arrival of Gullveig/Heiðr from outside the onset of the war.

The settlement between *æsir* and *vanir* turns on exchanges of hostages: Njǫrðr and Freyr, Hœnir and Mímir, and Kvasir. These liminal figures stand at the temporal and spatial boundaries between the two groups and to some extent articulate both the distinctions between the groups and the integration.

As I have suggested, through their transformations Kvasir and Mímir become analogous to Ymir. From this one may conclude that their mythological roles are to some extent also cosmogonic. Just as every slaying of a *jǫtunn* by Þórr recapitulates the cosmogonic slaying of Ymir, so, I would argue, do the transformations of these two tokens of the peace settlement recapitulate the transformation of the corpse of Ymir into the cosmos, perhaps the most important transformation in Old Norse mythology.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1941. *Heimskringla I*. Íslenzk fornrit 26. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Dronke, Ursula, ed. and transl. 1997. *The Poetic Edda: Vol. II: Mythological Poems*. Clarendon.

Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson, eds. 1892–96. *Hauksbók: Udgiven efter de Arnamagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4° samt forskellige papirshåndskrifter* [*Hauksbók*: An edition of the Arnamagnæan manuscripts no. 371, 544 and 675, 4° as well as various paper manuscripts]. Det kongelige nordiske oldskrift-selskab.

Faulkes, Anthony, transl. 1995. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda.* J. M. Dent.

———, ed. 1998. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. *Vol. 1: Introduction, Text and Notes.* Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

Fritzner, Johan. 1973 [1896]. *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog* [Dictionary of the Old Norse language]. 4th ed. Universitetsforlag.

Hollander, Lee M., transl. 1964. *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway by Snorri Sturluson.* University of Texas Press for the American-Scandinavian Foundation.

Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds. 2014. *Eddukvæði I: Goðakvæði.* Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Kraggerud, Egil, ed. and transl. 2018. *Theodoricus: De antiquitate regum Norwagiensium: On the Old Norwegian Kings*. The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, B169. Novus.

Larrington, Caroline, transl. 2014. *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford University Press.

Morris, William, ed. 1969. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. American Heritage Publishing and Houghton Mifflin.

von See, Klaus, Beatrice La Farge, Eve Picard, Ilona Priebe, and Katja Schulz. 1997. *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, II: Götterlieder: Skírnismál, Hárbarðsljóð, Hymiskviða, Lokasenna, Þrymskviða*. Universitätsverlag Winter.

von See, Klaus, Beatrice La Farge, and Katja Schulz, unter Mitwirkung von Simone Horst und Eve Picard. 2019. *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, I, Teil II: Götterlieder: Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál, Vǫluspá (H), Zwergenverzeichnis aus der Gylfaginning*. Universitätsverlag Winter.

Tétrel, Hélène. 2021. *La saga des Bretons: Étude, édition et traduction des Breta sögur islandaises*. Textes littéraires du moyen âge 63. Classiques Garnier.

Secondary Sources

Dumézil, Georges. 1973. *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, edited by Einar Haugen. University of California Press.

Faulkes, Anthony. 1978–79. "Descent from the Gods." *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11: 92–125.

———. 1993. "The Sources of *Skáldskaparmál*: Snorri's Intellectual Background." In *Snorri Sturluson: Kolloquium anläßlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, edited by Alois Wolf, 59–76. G. Narr.

Kuusela, Tommy. 2017. "'Þá mælti Míms hǫfuð:' Jätten Mimer som kunskapsförmedlare i fornnordisk tradition" ['Then Mímir's head spoke:' The giant Mímir as a transmitter of knowledge in Old Norse tradition]. *Scripta Islandica* 68: 331–59.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1969 [1964]. *The Raw and the Cooked*, translated by John and Doreen Weightman. J. Cape.

Lindow, John. 2003. "Cultures in Contact." In *Old Norse Myths, Literature, and Society*, edited by Margaret Clunies Ross, 89–109. The Viking Collection, 14. University Press of Southern Denmark.

———. 2021. "Vanir and Æsir." In *Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures*. *Vol. 3*, edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén, 1033–50. Brepols.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2014. "New Perspectives on the Vanir Gods in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Mythology and Religion." In *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Intersections, and Institutions*, edited by Timothy R. Tangherlini, 29–34. The Wildcat Canyon Advanced Seminars: Mythology 1. North Pinehurst Press.

Simek, Rudolf. 2010. "The Vanir: An Obituary." *Retrospective Methods Newsletter* 1: 10–19.

Würth, Stefanie. 1998. *Der "Antikenroman" in der isländischen Literatur des Mittelalters: Eine Untersuchung zur Übersetzung und Rezeption lateinischer Literatur im Norden.* Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 26. Helbing & Lichtenhahn.

HŒNIR – BEING A CHICKEN IN OLD NORSE

Karen Bek-Pedersen,[*] Benjamin Weber Pedersen[**]

It is never futile to consider the details.[1] Actual clarity is likely to remain beyond reach when the topic is as diffuse as mythology, but a few reasonable suggestions can be made even in a case such as Hœnir, an Old Norse deity who is often labelled 'obscure,' 'enigmatic,' 'shadowy' and the like. Our intention in the present article is to explore Hœnir from all major angles – name, kennings, myths – in order to see what picture emerges and to suggest some plausible avenues for making sense of that picture.

Name

The name of the indistinctly portrayed god Hœnir has an equally indistinct etymology and has been interpreted in various ways without scholars reaching any consensus. In particular, it has been linked to the verb *hœna*, meaning 'lure' or 'attract,' and to the noun *hœna*, meaning 'hen.' Both are readily intelligible Norse words that have been suggested as keys to Hœnir because of the etymological correlation that is often sought between name and name-bearer. However, what these potential links would tell us about the god has rarely been explored further. Other, more speculative, interpretations of the name include 'cockerel,' 'the tall one,' 'shining, white,' 'protector,' 'north wind,' 'guide of souls,' 'the sharpening one' (de Vries 1961, 278) and 'morning star' (in the sense of 'he who makes the cock crow;' Samplonius 2016, 495). There is no agreement among scholars about which direction to turn to. In our opinion, the 'hen,' *hœna*, is an important key, as will become clear below.

[*] Aarhus University.
[**] Independent Scholar.
[1] This article is a revised version of the chapter on Hœnir in Bek-Pedersen 2021, 609–19; several new ideas are presented here.

Kennings

In *Skáldskaparmál* 15, Snorri Sturluson notes the following kennings for Hœnir: *sessi eða sinni eða máli Óðins*, which translates as 'Óðinn's companion or trusted friend,' *hinn skjóti áss*, 'the quick *áss*,' *hinn langi fótr*, 'the long-legged one,' and *aurkonungr*, approximately 'mud-king or gravel-king.'[2] There are no obvious keys to the mud/gravel association (see Ström 1956, 60; Faulkes 1998b, 238), although the term recalls *jǫtunn*-names such as Aurgelmir and Aurboða, which in turn may be associated with origins and/or the chthonic realm (Kure 2010, 171; Bek-Pedersen 2021, 311–12).[3] The other kennings, however, are backed up by the skaldic poem *Haustlǫng*.[4] As far as we are aware, Hœnir is not mentioned in any other skaldic poems.

The relevant stanzas of *Haustlǫng* (1–13) concern the gods' dealings with the *jǫtunn* Þjazi – how Óðinn, Loki and Hœnir are cooking an ox; how Þjazi in the shape of an eagle prevents the cooking, claims a share of the meal and is accosted by Loki who strikes him with a cane, which then magically sticks to the eagle; and how Þjazi flies off with Loki, dragging him through the treetops and persuading him to bring Iðunn within Þjazi's reach. Hœnir's role is that Þjazi addresses him in stanza 4 when asking for a share of the ox. This suggests that Hœnir may be in charge of distributing the food.

Hœnir's name appears here in kennings for Loki. Stanza 3 refers to Loki as "Hœnis vinr" ('Hœnir's friend') and in stanza 12 as "hugreynandi Hœnis" ('Hœnir's mind-tester'). Stanza 4 refers to Hœnir himself by calling him "fet-Meili" ('step-Meili') which may describe a swift walker and fit with Snorri's kennings *hinn skjóti* and *hinn langi fótr*.

As for *hugreynandi*, this kenning seems to allude to Loki's kaleidoscopic character as someone who is difficult to figure out; but might it also say something about Hœnir? And if so, does it say that he is well-suited for the task (i.e. clever) or that it dumbfounds him (i.e. he is *not* clever)?[5] We will come back to this.

As for Meili, hardly anything is known about him. *Haustlǫng* 14 refers to Þórr as "Meila blóði" ('Meili's brother')[6] and in *Hárbarðsljóð* 9, Þórr calls himself "Meila bróðir."[7] So, the shared association with Meili provides a link between Þórr and Hœnir, both of whom seem to travel, either a lot or swiftly. Apart from the instances mentioned above, three other sources place Hœnir in the company of Óðinn and Loki, and in two cases they are on the move together.[8] So the idea of travelling seems to be there. It is

[2] *Skáldskaparmál* is cited from Faulkes 1998a. All translations are our own.

[3] The kenning may also be linked to the 'white mud', *hvíti aurr*, that waters the roots of Yggdrasill in *Vǫluspá* 19.

[4] This skaldic poem is cited in *Skáldskaparmál* 17 and 22. The part of the poem that tells the story involving Hœnir (stanzas 1–13) is found in *Skáldskaparmál* 22.

[5] Loki himself is referred to as Þórr's *geðreynir*, 'mind-tester', in *Þórsdrápa* 1 (found in *Skáldskaparmál* 18). This kenning is assumed to mean that Loki knows Þórr's mind well (Faulkes 1998b, 285).

[6] Found in *Skáldskaparmál* 17.

[7] Other than this, Meili is mentioned only in *þulur* IV e (Skj.B1, 660) as a son of Óðinn. Eddic poems are cited from Neckel and Kuhn 1962.

[8] The prose introduction to *Reginsmál; Huldar saga* 5 (a tale about the troll-woman Hulda, recorded in the eighteenth century, where King Óðinn and his two retainers Loki and Hœnir go hunting together;

characteristic of Þórr that he never travels by horse, only by chariot or by foot; Hœnir's long legs and his swiftness may suggest a similar situation or ability on his part. Hœnir and Þórr never appear in each other's company.

Myths

The narrative sources that relate to Hœnir have very different backgrounds. Although all of them were written down in Iceland in the Christian Middle Ages and were at that time valued primarily as objects of cultural heritage, some of them clearly have much older roots. Especially the skaldic and eddic poems are likely to reflect pre-Christian ideas, whereas *Snorra Edda* and *Ynglinga saga* are more likely to reflect medieval, Christian attempts at making sense of the older tradition. Because of this, the separate narrative glimpses of Hœnir do not necessarily have the same understanding of him. This complicates our attempt to piece together a coherent and intelligible portrait of Hœnir; but it does not prevent us from trying.

There are four myths in which Hœnir plays an active part: the creation myth according to *Vǫluspá*, the myth about the post-eschatological world, also according to *Vǫluspá*, and the myth about the exchange of hostages according to *Gylfaginning* and *Ynglinga saga*. He moreover appears in the myth about the gods' dealings with Þjazi according to *Haustlǫng*, discussed above. We will now consider the remaining three myths.

Hostage

Outwith *Vǫluspá* and *Haustlǫng*, Hœnir turns up in the hostage myth, which is extant in two prose texts. There are three versions of the truce between *æsir* and *vanir*, but only two involve hostages. According to *Gylfaginning* 23, the exchange of hostages consists of only Hœnir and Njǫrðr.[9] The chapter that yields this information concerns Njǫrðr and the episode is sparsely described: "Eigi er Njǫrðr ása ættar. Hann var upp fœddr í Vanaheimum, en vanir gísluðu hann goðunum ok tóku í mót at Ásagíslingu þann er Hœnir heitir. Hann varð at sætt med goðunum ok vǫnum." ('Njǫrðr is not of the family of *æsir*. He was brought up in Vanaheimar, but the *vanir* gave him as a hostage and took in exchange as an *æsir*-hostage the one called Hœnir. He became the pledge of truce between the gods and the *vanir*').

No mention of what caused the exchange of hostages. No mention of Mímir, Kvasir or Freyr; no details of what happens to Hœnir, what his characteristics are or how he fares among the *vanir*. No decapitations. Nothing. This is interesting. It suggests a degree of correspondence between Njǫrðr and Hœnir, seeing them as equivalents, but no

Abrahamson 1805, 276); *Lokka táttur* (a Faroese ballad, recorded in the nineteenth century, where Óðin turns a boy fleeing from a *risi* into a seed grain, Hønir turns him into a swan feather and Lokki turns him into a fish egg; Hammershaimb 1851, 140–45. Interestingly, the swan on whose head Hønir's feather sits has its head torn off in stanza 34).

[9] *Gylfaginning* is cited from Faulkes 2005.

details are specified. For this, we need to look to the longer version of the story, which is also the most coherent narrative involving Hœnir.

Ynglinga saga 4 concerns the conflict between *æsir* and *vanir*.[10] According to this, the two groups of gods agree after some time on a truce that involves an exchange of hostages. The *vanir* send Njǫrðr and Freyr – and presumably Freyja, who is not mentioned when the actual exchange takes place, but who is later assumed to now be among the *æsir*. Njǫrðr and Freyr are described as "inir ágæztu" ('the most excellent') among the *vanir*. The *æsir* on the other hand send Hœnir, described as "mikill maðr ok inn vænsti" ('a sizeable man and the most handsome,') and they describe him as well suited to being a chieftain; with Hœnir comes the wise Mímir – "inn vitrasti maðr." Following this, the *vanir* now also send Kvasir, who is the wisest among them – "þann, er spakastr var í þeirra flokki." On arriving in Vanaheimr, Hœnir is immediately made chieftain, and Mímir advises him at all times; but when he is alone and is asked advice, he says: "ráði aðrir" ('let others decide'). Because of this, the *vanir* feel cheated. They now grab Mímir, decapitate him and return his head to Óðinn, who preserves it by magical means so that it is able to tell him about many hidden things ("ok sagði honum marga leynda hluti").

This story is short but also complex. The *vanir* offer two hostages and the *æsir* respond with two hostages – but the *vanir* then offer a third hostage, with no response from the *æsir*. Simultaneously, Freyja's move from *vanir* to *æsir* is obscured, but she is actually a fourth hostage from the *vanir*. So, four individuals move in with the *æsir* and only two go to the *vanir*. *Ynglinga saga* 4 might conflate separate versions of the myth, reinterpreting the roles of Mímir and Kvasir. Nothing more is said about Kvasir in *Ynglinga saga*, but there is a neat parallel between him and Mímir, who both represent knowledge; this may suggest a similar parallel between Njǫrðr and Hœnir.

Also, you have to wonder why their dissatisfaction with Hœnir leads the *vanir* to decapitate Mímir. What happens to Hœnir is unclear; it only says that the *vanir* sent the head to the *æsir*. It is sometimes assumed that Hœnir returns with the head, but it is also possible that he remains among the *vanir* until after Ragnarǫk, just like Njǫrðr is said to return to Vanaheimr when the world comes to an end.[11] Up until then, Njǫrðr remains among the *æsir*, while Hœnir seems to be absent. Indeed, this would match the chronology of events in *Vǫluspá*, where Hœnir participates in the creation of humankind; only then do we hear about the conflict between the *æsir* and *vanir* (without hostages) and at the very end Hœnir returns, after Ragnarǫk.[12] With this in mind, could it be that one of the reasons we hear so little about Hœnir is that he is absent from Ásgarðr most of the time?

In *Ynglinga saga* 4, Hœnir is linked to Mímir, and since Mímir represents wisdom, insight, knowledge about 'hidden things,' it seems fair to assume that Hœnir represents

[10] *Ynglinga saga* is cited from ÍF 26.

[11] *Vafþrúðnismál* 39.

[12] *Sǫgubrot af fornkonungum* 3 (FSN 1, 348) calls him "hræddastr ása" ('the most fearful of *æsir*'). It is hard to ascertain the validity of this somewhat isolated detail. Perhaps he can be regarded as cowardly because he does not partake in Ragnarǫk?

something that resembles or complements this. But the myth portrays him as unable or unwilling to act without Mímir's advice, which has led to the interpretation that he lacks intelligence (e.g. Schjødt 2020, 1393). Hœnir is 'stupid guy.' However, also Óðinn depends on Mímir's advice at various points, and he is not stupid, so perhaps this interpretation is too simple. If the kenning that describes Loki as 'Hœnir's mind-tester' says something specific about Hœnir – something that sets him apart from others – then it seems more likely to refer to his ability to decode Loki. Our rationale here is that Loki confounds pretty much everyone, so being baffled by Loki is nothing unusual. Also, shrewdness could explain why Hœnir appears in the company of Loki and Óðinn; after all, is it not more likely that two very clever guys should hang out with yet another clever guy (instead of with a stupid guy)?

As mentioned, in *Gylfaginning* 23 only Hœnir and Njǫrðr are exchanged as hostages; and *Gylfaginning* says nothing more about Hœnir. It suggests that Hœnir and Njǫrðr are perceived as parallels and, if we accept that Hœnir possibly remains among the *vanir* – as Njǫrðr remains among the *æsir* – then this establishes the status of 'foreigner' as a trait shared by Hœnir and Njǫrðr. They also have beauty in common; *Ynglinga saga* 4 describes Hœnir as 'the most handsome' and, when Skaði is choosing her spouse from among the *æsir* by looking at their legs, she makes a remark about beauty when she points at Njǫrðr's legs.[13] Skaði is disappointed with the owner of the legs, but we must conclude from this myth that at least Njǫrðr's legs are beautiful. So, beauty and being a foreigner.

Another link is that they both become chieftains in their adopted surroundings. In *Ynglinga saga* 11, Njǫrðr takes over the rule of Sweden after Óðinn's death. Njǫrðr's rule is described as successful; he brings peace and prosperity. Hœnir's being among the *vanir* is more obscure. In *Ynglinga saga* 4, Hœnir relies on Mímir and there is seemingly something suspect about this; their communication must be taking place in secret or it would not come as a surprise to the *vanir* (Heslop 2018, 72–74). We cannot tell how long Hœnir's career as a chieftain among the *vanir* is, but it appears to be successful up until the discovery of his dubious reliance on Mímir. But what is wrong about Mímir's support? Again, there are no clear answers, but perhaps Mímir's status as an *áss* (in the mythology as a whole) is shaky; *Ynglinga saga* 4 is the *only* text that places him among the *æsir*. He is never said to be a relative of any *æsir*, while several kennings and other snippets suggest that he has close affinities to the *jǫtnar*, the chthonic and the firmament.[14] Is it perhaps Mímir's position as a complete outsider that causes the *vanir* to react so strongly? Perhaps doing things Óðinn's way – such as relying on knowledge from *jǫtnar* – is not to the *vanir*'s liking? As for Hœnir's apparent inability to make his own decisions and his famous words, "ráði aðrir" ('let others decide') they may be linked to Hœnir's status as a ritual expert linked to prophecy, which will be explored below. After all, the person carrying out a prophetic ritual is, in fact, asking others for advice.

[13] *Skáldskaparmál* G56.

[14] Likely because he figures as a severed head and the firmament is elsewhere described as the skull of a *jǫtunn*: Ymir; *Gylfaginning* 8.

Looking at the third version of the truce between the *æsir* and *vanir*, namely *Skáldskaparmál* G57, no hostages feature at all. Instead, an agreement is established by means of everyone from both sides spitting into the same vat, following which the *æsir* create Kvasir from the spittle. Kvasir's prime characteristic is wisdom and the ability to answer all questions. But he is neither of the *æsir* nor the *vanir*; he is both. Kvasir's subsequent transformation into a precious liquid is caused by *dvergar*. This version of the truce mentions *only* Kvasir. Mímir, Njǫrðr and Hœnir do not figure. Even so, Kvasir and his fate parallel the story about Mímir according to *Ynglinga saga*, because he, too, is killed as a result of sharing his knowledge with others and yet he lives on in the form of a liquid source of wisdom, which is linked specifically to Óðinn: the mead of poetry – on Mímir's part, it is the spring of Mímisbrunnr and his transformation is caused by the *vanir*.

What can be deduced from this is that there is one set of parallels between Hœnir and Njǫrðr and another set of parallels between Mímir and Kvasir. It may be Hœnir's Óðinnic methods of obtaining wisdom that upset the *vanir*. The tendency among scholars is to see Hœnir as a wannabe Óðinn, but to be fair, this is simply caused by the fact that we know a great deal more about Óðinn and are therefore liable to give him primacy at all times. There could be a perfectly legitimate overlap in interests and abilities; it does not have to be one deity emulating another.

Creation and the New World

According to *Vǫluspá* 17–18, Hœnir, together with Óðinn and Lóðurr – another poorly known figure – gives things to human beings that make them human. This granting of gifts is described as follows:[15]

> Unz þrír komo / ór því liði,
> ǫflgir ok ástgir, / æsir, at húsi;
> fundo á landi, / lítt megandi,
> Ask ok Emblo, / ørlǫglausa.
>
> Qnd þau né átto, / óð þau né hǫfðo,
> lá né læti / né lito góða;
> ǫnd gaf Óðinn, / óð gaf Hœnir,
> lá gaf Lóðurr / ok lito góða.

This means something to the effect that the three *æsir* who are "ǫflgir ok ástgir" ('powerful and loving') arrive at a house and find Askr and Embla lying on the ground, without fate or abilities. Óðinn then gives them *ǫnd* ('breath, spirit'), Hœnir gives them *óðr* ('mind, reason, soul, poetry'), and Lóðurr gives them "lá ok lito góða" ('blood and

[15] The wording of *Vǫluspá* 17 varies between the R and H versions.

good colours').[16] This, at least, is one possible interpretation (among many). There is no scholarly agreement about exactly what it is each of the three gods grants, but it looks as if Óðinn gives the humans spiritual abilities, Hœnir gives them cognitive or intellectual abilities, and Lóðurr gives them physical ones. In this particular instance, Hœnir may be seen as the balancing force between the spirit, represented by Óðinn, and the body, represented by Lóðurr. It is possible that he has a similar balancing function in the cases where he occurs together with Óðinn and Loki, who may be seen as opposites representing, respectively, a creative and a destructive force.

According to *Vǫluspá*, then, Hœnir endows humans with cognition and/or intellect, which means that he must be in some sort of way a clever chap who belongs in the company of the wily Loki and the crafty Óðinn, as *Haustlǫng* has it. When we think of Hœnir's gift as Óðinnic, this is biased by our tendency to emphasise Óðinn above all other gods. The linguistic likeness between Hœnir's gift, *óðr*, and the name *Óðinn* is certainly there, but this alone does not make Hœnir a hypostasis of Óðinn, as some scholars have suggested (Ström 1956, 66; cf. Holtsmark 1990, 165–66; Wanner 2009, 244–46). Nor does it mean that he loses his own intellectual powers when he bestows such faculties upon human beings, as has also been suggested (Ström 1956, 57). In fact, it appears to simply emphasise that Hœnir is, indeed, cerebrally gifted and that there is a close relationship between him and Óðinn (cf. Lindow 2001, 180). Hœnir is 'clever guy.'

Hœnir is then mentioned again towards the end of *Vǫluspá* among the gods who survive the eschatology and take part in establishing the new world. No other sources mention Hœnir at this point in the cosmology. *Vǫluspá* 61 (R) says briefly and cryptically that "Þá kná Hænir hlautvið kiósa"[17] ('then Hœnir can/will select prophecy-twigs [?]') The term *hlautviðr* is usually taken to refer to twigs or other pieces of wood with a ritual function linked to something called *hlaut*. This, in turn, is often thought to describe the blood from a sacrificial animal, but there is no clear evidence for that.[18] The Hauksbók version (stanza 55) has *hlutviðr* ('lot/fate/prophecy twigs') which suggests a link to prophecy, and the fact that the context is ritual seems clear enough. Thus, the scene has given rise to seeing Hœnir as a kind of ritual expert (cf. Holtsmark 1990, 165–66; Dronke 1993, 122–23; Hultgård 2017, 115–16).

Setting this scene in relation to all the other snippets known about Hœnir, the picture in *Vǫluspá* 61 seems fairly coherent: He returns to the *æsir* – as Njǫrðr returns to the *vanir*, although Njǫrðr returns home before the eschatology, Hœnir after it. The role he fulfils is ritual and involves prophecy, which may recall Óðinn – like Njǫrðr is said (in *Ynglinga saga* 11) to take over the role of leader after Óðinn's death. He belongs to the older generation of gods whereas the other survivors belong to the younger, but his younger-

[16] See Kure 2010, 173–205 for a discussion of the creation of humans in Norse tradition and Kure 2010, 297–99 for a very reasonable interpretation of *Vǫluspá* 18.

[17] Thus *Vǫluspá* 61 (R); *Vǫluspá* 55 (H) has *hlutviðr*.

[18] Hultgård 2017, 115 notes that the meaning 'sacrificial blood' is Snorri's explanation and that we do not have any independent corroboration (or alternatives). Schjødt 2020, 1394 includes a very reasonable discussion of this difficult statement about Hœnir.

generation associates in the new world (according to *Vǫluspá*) are also linked to Óðinn.[19] So, he resembles Njǫrðr and Óðinn.

Chicken Guy?

Having considered the myths, we now need to revisit the notion of poultry.

Hœnir has been compared to a cockerel because of the likeness of his name to the noun *hœna*, meaning 'hen.' His remark in *Ynglinga saga* 4, "ráði aðrir," has even been thought by some to resemble the noise made by a cockerel crowing (Holtsmark 1990, 165) – although the words sound nothing like that in our ears. Besides, why the cockerel would request that someone else decide every morning is not clear. But there could be other ways of linking Hœnir to this particular bird.

Precious little is said about hens or cockerels in Norse mythical and ritual tradition, but if all the information is considered together, a picture does emerge. In many European traditions, birds in general are thought to possess and convey hidden knowledge (Green 2023, 9–52; cf. Sayers 1992, 63; Kure 2010, 299), and in Norse material, this tradition is expressed especially through ravens, but also other birds, as in *Fáfnismál* 31–32, where the hero Sigurðr attains the ability to understand bird speech and thus saves his life. In addition, there are several cocks crowing various places in the mythology. Let us take a look at them.

Vǫluspá 41 and 42 (R, H 32 and 33) mentions three cockerels that crow at Ragnarǫk. Firstly, a beautiful red rooster named Fjalarr; then the cockerel Gullinkambi, who crows in Óðinn's home and wakens his warriors; lastly a soot-red rooster that crows in the halls of Hel – all of them as preambles to the final battle. This may indicate that the cockerel is symbolically linked to warfare and to transitions: The bird heralds not only the coming of the new day, but also that of the destruction of the world.

Less directly, but still very relevant to Norse mythic tradition – and to Hœnir – Saxo tells a story (*Gesta Danorum* 1, 8, 14)[20] about Hadingus, who goes on a journey through the underworld: In the middle of winter, a woman carrying hemlocks in bloom rises up out of the ground near the fireplace where King Hadingus is seated and asks him whether he would like to see where such plants grow at that time of year. He follows her into the ground and along a cold, foggy path to a sunny land, across a bridge over a river full of weapons, until finally, they reach a high wall which they cannot get across. Now the woman grabs a cockerel she has brought with her, wrings its head off and throws the head over the wall – and immediately they hear the bird crowing on the other side.

This episode about Hadingus does not immediately link to Hœnir as we know him – but perhaps the rooster does. The point of decapitating the cockerel and throwing the head over the wall must be that the bird is 'resurrected' or at least regains its voice on the other side. The fact that the place behind the wall remains inaccessible to Hadingus and the woman suggests that it is the world of the dead. Saxo writes in Latin, but he

[19] According to *Vafþrúðnismál* 51, the survivors are Víðarr and Váli together with Móði and Magni.

[20] *Gesta Danorum* is cited from Friis-Jensen 2005.

presumably recounts a Norse story. It is thus interesting that the Norse verb *gala* can be used both about the noise made by a rooster and about 'singing magical chants,' 'enchanting' and 'using *galdr*' (Fritzner 1886–1896 s.v. *gala*; cf. Sayers 1992, 63). And there is the chopped-off head that continues to speak – as Mímir's head does to Óðinn, who masters the art of *galdr*.

The similarity between the cockerel and Mímir thus seems clear. They both lose their heads, but due to special circumstances and/or their presence in the underworld they retain their ability to speak, to *gala* and thus to foretell the future. Alongside this, Hœnir's name may well be associated with poultry (Holtsmark 1990, 165; Dronke 1993, 122–23; Kure 2010, 189, 299), perhaps indicating similarly prophetic abilities on his part.

If we go beyond the mythic material, we encounter other links between chickens and prophecy. When the sorceress Þorbjǫrg *lítilvǫlva* performs her *seiðr* in *Eiríks saga rauða* 4, she is sitting on a cushion stuffed specifically with hen's feathers, *hœnsafiðri* (ÍF 4, 206). Her ritual also involves other animals in various ways – their skin as garments and their flesh as food – but the cushion placed on the special platform is where she sits when she makes her predictions.

Further afield, in connection with his description of a rich man's funeral near the Volga and among apparently Swedish Vikings, the Arab diplomat Ibn Fadlan, writing in AD 921, mentions a cock and a hen as two of the animals that are sacrificed and thrown onboard the boat on which the man is buried. The other animals are a dog, two horses and two cows (*Ibn Fadlan* 2012, 51). Perhaps even more relevant is the chicken given to the slave girl who is to be sacrificed in order to enter the realm of the dead together with her master. Three times, she is lifted up to look over a structure resembling a doorframe and each time she says that she sees first her parents, then her dead relatives and finally her dead master, as if she is looking into the realm of the dead. Following this, she is handed a chicken. She cuts off its head and throws it away, and the body of the bird is then tossed onto the funeral boat (*Ibn Fadlan* 2012, 52). This is strikingly similar to the scene with Hadingus and the woman in the underworld. For reasons that may be obvious, Ibn Fadlan's chicken does not crow after its head has been removed, but it has clearly been sent to the Otherworld. Saxo and Ibn Fadlan's descriptions may well describe a Norse ritual linked to crossing the border between the living and the dead.

Roman Hens

The practice of divining by birds of all kinds was widespread among the Romans, who regarded it as an ancient practice, dating back at least as far as the mythical founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus. A great many different wild birds could play this part, but the Romans had a predilection for one domesticated bird: the chicken (Green 2023, 62–83). The chicken has its origins in the Far East and did not become widespread in the Roman area until the third century BC. It seems that the impetus for the bird's spread across Europe was related to cockfighting and its usefulness in ritual contexts – with roosters seen as potent symbols of combat while only hens were used in divination rituals, being a little more placid than their male counterparts (Green 2023, 73–74).

Because of the belief in birds as harbingers of otherworldly messages, chickens were for many centuries kept mainly for ritual purposes rather than for their meat – it was the behaviour of live birds that was observed.

Chickens were introduced to southern Scandinavia around the birth of Christ, about the same time as cats, geese and ducks, and as a result of influences from the Roman area (Kveiborg 2008, 60). That is some seven or eight centuries before we imagine the deity Hœnir to have been part of Norse beliefs, which is probably sufficient time for such a figure to develop. Additionally, the Roman preference for hens over roosters when it comes to auguries may, perhaps, explain why Hœnir's name is based on the female bird rather than the male – he, too, is a ritual figure, not a fighter.

Conclusions

Having considered all aspects, are we now any closer to an understanding of Hœnir as more than just 'shadowy'? We believe so. Of course, there are still questions that seek answers: If he is linked to hens, why do we never see him handle these birds? Why does he choose twigs and not chicks? Why do roosters figure but not hens? Quite possibly because Hœnir is not a Roman and, by the time the myths were committed to writing, more than a millennium had gone by and the roles of both Hœnir and the hens had changed. In other words, we do not know the answers to these questions. Likewise, it is evident from the snippets that link Hœnir to Meili and to Þórr that some parts of his portrait have been lost, but we do believe that a fairly coherent picture of him can be drawn. Of course, mythology is not an exact science, and there is no guarantee that the extant sources draw on the same variants of the overall tradition. On the other hand, the evidence regarding Hœnir is so slim and scattered that we are unlikely to get anywhere unless we are willing to assume that the disparate pieces somehow complement one another – although there is no guarantee of this, either. With this in mind, we would like to present a cautious suggestion:

Hœnir's name seems etymologically linked to hens, and his association with ritual prophecy (evident in *Vǫluspá*) may likewise be connected to these birds. His famous request to 'let others decide,' "ráði aðrir," may simply indicate that he carries out prophetic rituals, thus appealing to other powers to provide an answer.

He is indisputably linked to Óðinn as his trusted friend: they travel together, they can both access Mímir's knowledge, and Hœnir's gift to humans is *óðr*.

He is linked to Loki as a travelling companion, but probably also in other ways no longer discernible to us, as seems implied in the mind-testing kenning, which we believe also hints at Hœnir's intellectual capacity.

He is linked to Njǫrðr: They are exchanged for one another as hostages; both are handsome and foreigners, both become chieftains in manners that link them to Óðinn as his successors (Njǫrðr in Uppsala, Hœnir among the *vanir* and apparently also in the post-eschatological world).

He is linked to Mímir in other ways. They both 'disappear' into the world of the *vanir*, only to re-emerge again – Mímir as the severed yet talking head with strong associations

to the well of wisdom and its chthonic, numinous qualities; Hœnir in the new world that emerges after Ragnarǫk where he is linked to ritual activity.

So, Hœnir is associated with swiftness, long legs and travelling, with cognitive and intellectual abilities, with poultry, prophecy and transitions – and possibly the maintenance of balance between creative and destructive forces. As to whether our interpretation of Hœnir outlined here is viable, there is really only one thing we can say: *Let others decide!*

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Ibn Fadlan = Lunde, Paul, ed. 2012. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, translated by Caroline Stone. Penguin Books.

ÍF 4 = Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds. 1935. *Eyrbyggja saga*. Íslenzk fornrit 4. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

ÍF 26 = Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1941. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla* I. Íslenzk fornrit 26. Hið islenzka fornritafélag.

Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1998a. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. Vol. 1: Introduction, Text and Notes. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

———, ed. 1998b. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. Vol. 2: Glossary and Index of Names. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

———, ed. 2005. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

FSN 1 = Guðni Jónsson, ed. 1959. *Fornaldar sögur norðurlanda.* Vol. 1. 4 vols. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.

Hammershaimb, V. U., ed. 1851. *Færöiske Kvæder* I. Det Nordiske Litteratur-Samfund.

Neckel, Gustav and Hans Kuhn, eds. 1962. *Edda – Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. Carl Winter Universitätsverlag.

Friis-Jensen, Karsten, ed. 2005. Saxo Grammaticus. *Gesta Danorum – Danmarkshistorien*, translated by Peter Zeeberg. 2 vols. Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab & Gads Forlag.

Skj.B1 = Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1973. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning. B1: Rettet tekst*. Rosenkilde & Bagger.

Secondary Sources

Abrahamson, Werner Hans Frederik. 1805. "Hulde." *Det skandinaviske litteraturselskabs skrifter 1*: 263–334.

Bek-Pedersen, Karen. 2021. *Guder og gudinder i nordisk mytologi* [Gods and goddesses in Norse mythology]. Turbine.

Dronke, Ursula. 1993. "Pagan Beliefs and Christian Impact: The Contribution of Eddic Studies." In *Viking Revaluations – Viking Society Centenary Symposium 14–15 May 1992*,

edited by Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins, 121–27. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

Fritzner, Johan. 1886–1896. *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog* [Dictionary of the Old Norse language]. 3 vols. Feilberg & Landmark.

Green, Ashleigh. 2023. *Birds in Roman Life and Myth*. Routledge.

Heslop, Kate. 2018. "Talking Heads: The Mediality of Mímir." In *Re:Writing: Medial Perspectives on Textual Culture in the Icelandic Middle Ages*, edited by Kate Heslop and Jürg Glauser, 63–84. Medienwandel – Medienwechsel – Medienwissen 29. Chronos.

Holtsmark, Anne. 1990. *Norrøn mytologi* [Norse mythology]. Det Norske Samlaget.

Hultgård, Anders. 2017. *Midgård brinner: Ragnarök i religionshistorisk belysning* [Midgard burns: Ragnarök from the History of Religions perspective]. Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur.

Kure, Henning. 2010. *I begyndelsen var skriget* [In the beginning was the scream]. Gyldendal.

Kveiborg, Jacob. 2008. "Fårehyrder, kvægbønder eller svineavlere: En revurdering af jernalderens dyrehold" [Sheep herders, cattle farmers or pig farmers: A reevaluation of Iron Age animal husbandry]. *Kuml* 2008: 59–100.

Lindow, John. 2001. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. ABC-Clio.

Samplonius, Kees. 2016. "Lá gaf Lóðurr: Notes on Vsp. 17–18." *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 76, no. 4: 478–99.

Sayers, William. 1992. "Soundboxes of the Divine: Hœnir, Sencha, Gwalchmai." *Mankind Quarterly* 33: 57–67.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2020. "Hœnir." In *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structure, Volume 3: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings*, edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén, 1391–93. Brepols.

Ström, Folke. 1956. *Loki: Ein mythologisches Problem*. Göteborgs Universitets Årsskrift.

de Vries, Jan. 1961. *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. E. J. Brill.

Wanner, Kevin J. 2009. "Cunning Intelligence in Norse Myth: Loki, Óðinn, and the Limits of Sovereignty." *History of Religions* 48, no. 3: 211–46.

WHY IS EGGÞÉR HAPPY – AND WHO IS HE?

ON THE HERDER AND THE ROOSTERS IN *VǪLUSPÁ* 42–43, WITH DIGRESSIONS ON HARPS AND GOSLING-TREES

Henning Haglskær Kure*

In celebration of Terry Adrian Gunnell and friendship

Of the visions voiced by the *vǫlva* or seeress in the Old Norse poem *Vǫluspá*, one in particular seems to be rooted at the crossroads of myth, folklore, and ritual performance. The poetic rendering of this vision opens on happy Eggþér, herder of a *gýgr* (a common term for a *jǫtunn*-woman – we are certainly not going to use the term 'giant/giantess' in the present article). Eggþér is sitting on a mound and striking a harp. Three roosters are crowing: one in the tree just over him; one further above over the *æsir* (the gods) awaking Óðinn's men; and one beneath the ground at Hel's, the mistress of the dead. The present article will present new thoughts on the meaning and context of this vision, which takes up two stanzas in the midsection of the poem – somewhere between the creation and *ragnarǫk* – numbered 42–43 in the Bugge 1867 standard reference.

42.	Sat þar á haugi ok sló hǫrpo gýgiar hirðir glaðr eggþér gól um hánom í gaglviði fagrrauðr hani sá er fialarr heitir	He sat there on a mound and struck the harp, the herder of the *gýgr*, happy Eggþér. Over him in the gallows-tree crowed the bright-red rooster, who is called Fjalarr.

* Gentleman scholar, Copenhagen.

43.	Gól um ásom	gullinkambi	Over the *æsir* crowed the golden-
	sá vekr hǫlða	at heriafǫðrs	combed, who awakens the men at
	en annarr gelr	fyr iǫrð neðan	Herjafǫðr's, and another crows beneath
	sótrauðr hani	at sǫlom heliar.	the earth, the soot-red rooster at the halls of Hel.

(*Vǫluspá* 42–43, based on the R-version in the orthography of Neckel 1927. All translations are mine)

The vision forms a separate unit that seemingly can be placed differently in the sequence of events without changing the semantic identity of the full poem, as it is attested in its two extant versions, in the manuscripts *Codex Regius* GKS 2365 4to/'R' and *Hauksbók* AM 544 4to/'H' respectively. However, the ordering of stanzas is probably not entirely arbitrary.[1]

The Sound of Ragnarǫk

The three crowing roosters are usually understood as portents of the advent of *ragnarǫk*, heralding it in the mythical worlds of the *jǫtnar*, the gods, and the dead humans respectively. Eggþér then is taken to be a *jǫtunn*, who expresses the glee of his race over the expected death of the gods. The portent part is supported by the introduction of the '*ragnarǫk* refrain' (*Geyr garmr…* 'Garmr barks…') that immediately precedes (H) or follows (R) the vision. The crowing and barking seem to start a chain of noises that crescendo through the following description of world destruction. This element of sound contributes decisively to the experience of the poem and its parts as a whole.[2] However, as a vision of the *vǫlva* in a poem densely packed with semantics, allegories, and metaphors, the portent function does not convincingly satisfy all there is to it in regard to content. Nor does it explain the many details of the vision or how they are thought to inform the whole: the specific colours of the roosters, the 'gallows-tree' (that might be a 'gosling-tree'), and the presence in this context of a herder, who plays a harp and for some unstated reason is said to be *glaðr* ('glad, happy, radiant').

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing?

The vision of a herder sitting on a mound and herding his sheep is hardly a strange sight by itself. Calling him Eggþér is a bit odd, though. The name (in this form only attested here in R) means 'edge-servant,' 'blade-servant,' a name more suitable for a warrior. It is written "Egðir" in the H-version; a form that likely means the same (KLE 2019, 329f., 1534) but is more widely used. Egðir is attested as both a personal name for men (but not for *jǫtnar*) and as a *heiti* for 'wolf' and 'eagle,' animals that are associated with killing,

[1] On the methodological principle used in the present article of reading the holistic content of *Vǫluspá* as the semantic sum of the two exclusively poetic versions, see Sørensen 2006, 23; Kure 2023, 7.

[2] On the awareness and uses of sound in order to retain and direct the performative and experiential aspects of *Vǫluspá*, see Gunnell 2013; 2016, 94f.

battle – and being predators of sheep. Commentators have noted that a herder can be regarded as a ward or protector in general and thus instead serve the *gýgr* as her guardian or even as her spouse (for an overview see KLE 2019, 328f.). This draws attention to the identity of the *gýgr*. She is believed by several commentators to be identical with another *gýgr* only referred to as *in aldna* (f. 'the ancient one') in another vision by the *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá* 40–41. The ancient one sits in *járnviðr*, where she breeds Fenrir's kin, which is generally perceived as wolves.[3] This associates the ancient one with Angrboða, the *jǫtunn*-woman that parented Fenrisúlfr and Hel with Loki (*Hyndluljóð* 40; *Edda: Gylfaginning* ch. 34). And this in turn has led to the suggestion that rather than being a shepherd, Eggþér is the wolf-herder of Angrboða (Salus and Taylor 1969, 78–80). Wolf-herder does admittedly make a 'cooler' fit for the name Eggþér, but it remains an unfounded speculation.

Handbooks typically present Eggþér at the outset as a guardian of the *gýgr* in *járnviðr*.[4] This obscures the fact that no one has ever presented a proper argument for this crossover idea. Apart from both of them being *gýgjar*, a common synonym for *jǫtunn*-women, there is nothing in the text to connect the ancient mother of Fenrir's kin with Eggþér's mistress (cf. Hultgård 2017, 87). The Fenrir-vision immediately precedes the Eggþér-vision in the R-version of *Vǫluspá*, but with no evidently compelling connection (KLE 2019, 329), and the two visions are arranged considerably apart in the flow of the H-version. The astronomic interpretation of the Fenrir-vision in Snorri's *Edda: Gylfaginning* ch. 12, is not helpful either, because Snorri does not mention Eggþér, his mistress, or the roosters (including Gullinkambi) at all.

When the Red Rooster Crows

Rather than speculations about absent wolves, perhaps the present three roosters may provide clues to happy Eggþér and his significance to the vision. The rooster closest to Eggþér is called Fjalarr, a name also used for dwarfs and as an epithet for certain *jǫtnar* (KLE 2019, 332f.). It appears to be a generic name to the verb *fela* ('hide') that indicates an affinity with the mythical sphere – the 'hidden' world – but it may also be etymologised *fjǫl-* ('much') *-arr* (< *heer* 'army;' cf. KLE 2019, 166) > figuratively: 'a much-dominating force.' The two other roosters are referred to as *gullinkambi* ('golden-combed') and *sótrauðr* ('soot-red'). Both terms have been understood as names, especially *gullinkambi*, but to me, they rather seem to be adjectival echoes of the *fagrrauðr* ('bright-red') colour of Fjalarr. None of the roosters is mentioned in any other myth – not even a Gullinkambi with the *æsir* in *Gylfaginning* or in the otherwise detailed account of 'Asgardian' animals in the poem *Grímnismál*. We are therefore left with the information of the present stanzas, also in regard to limiting the interpretative options, as roosters worldwide are very productive symbols of many things.

[3] *Járnviðr*: 'iron-wood,' 'weapon-forest;' usually taken for a mythical place-name, but perhaps more likely a *kenning* for 'battle,' the breeding ground for aggression symbolised by wolves, cf. Kure 2024.

[4] For examples see Simek 1993, 69; Orchard 1997, 35. Lindow 2001, 102 at least uses 'might be' instead of 'is.'

Most strikingly to me, all of the three roosters are associated with the dead. One crows over Eggþér in the gallows-tree associated with the hanged; another crows over the *æsir* above, awaking the men in the hall of Herjafǫðr ('ravage-sire' i.e. Óðinn) associated with the *val*, the chosen slain (cf. Simek 1993, 122); and yet another crows below at the hall of Hel, which of course is the home of the ordinary deceased.

Equally conspicuous are the colours of the three mythical roosters. They have been seen as retrospective parallels to the trio of a white, a red, and a black rooster known from later folktales and Danish folksongs (Köhler 1866; KLE 2019, 327f.). The trio warns the creatures of the night – devils and ghosts – to crawl back from where they came before the sun rises. Even though these roosters can be said to be within the semantic field of the dead, the function of their colours rather seems to be the production of variable rhymes of which the only constant one in every song is *røde—døde* ('red'—'dead').

The colours of the mythical roosters also have been seen to signal their worlds of origin (Nordal 1927, 85; KLE 2019, 327). The gold expresses the noble status and spiritual enlightenment of the gods above, while darkness suits the sombre environment of the realm of death below. The tendency to see 'golden' as shining light and 'soot-red' as just black or dark, obscures the point of red being the primary colour element of all three roosters. Each of them actually sports a different hue of red. Furthermore, the unique compound of 'soot' and 'red' indisputably associates the colour with the process of burning. This is supported by the way the colours are ordered in the vertical sequence of the roosters: smouldering soot-red at the bottom, ascending to flaring bright-red in the middle, and ending in a golden-red rooster-comb at the top, shaped like flame-tips.

In his brief survey of mythical rooster symbolism, Jacob Grimm (1835, 386) mentions the three roosters in the same breath as the saying "the red rooster crows over the roof," a rustic phrase for house-burning fire. The phrase is known from Scandinavian and German folklore, occurring in written medieval sources as documented by early Danish dictionaries.[5] Variants of the phrase are still common in at least Denmark and Germany, and as with many other folklore sayings, we may speculate that it dates far further back than scanty literary mentions. In his dictionary (page 76 in the original manuscript GKS 774 fol.) Matthias Moth fragmentarily cites Cicero as a source for the phrase, but I have not been able to confirm whether the context of the citation actually does involve a crowing *gallus ruber*. Nonetheless, I find it reasonable to assume that 'the crow of the red rooster' is likely to have been a rustic phrase for a burning fire in Scandinavia already in the Viking Age. This assumption – supported by the 'soot-red' compound – will be decisive to my argument in the following. However, the burning does not necessarily exclude or contrast with other meanings of the crowing. The rooster's crow is often taken to herald the advent of a new day or new times, which actually would accentuate the common metaphorical conception of fire as an agency of transformation and change. In the context of heralding *ragnarǫk* this would seem highly relevant. If all of this applies to the crowing red roosters of the vision in *Vǫluspá*, it points out the tree mentioned in stanza 42 as the object that burns.

[5] Cf. 'hane' in for instance https://kalkarsordbog.dk/ or https://mothsordbog.dk/.

The Barnacle Goose Myth

The red rooster crows in a tree (or forest, beam, wood, etc.) called *gaglviðr* ('gosling-tree') in the R-version and *gálgviðr* ('gallows-tree') in the H-version. Commentators have suggested a wide range of interpretations of this tree, but how the ideas are thought to inform the vision and its context in the poem as a whole is rarely explored (for a survey see KLE 2019, 330ff., *í gaglviði*, and 1534ff, *í gálgviði*). Many different explanations of the two terms for what at least semantically must be the same tree are offered, but the most auspicious suggestions, in my opinion, take 'gallows-tree' as their point of departure (following Bugge 1867, 390). The gallows is the link between the tree on which Óðinn hung for nine nights during the ritual of his self-initiation (*Hávamál* 138) and the name *Yggdrasils askr*, literally 'the ash of the dread-horse' – the 'dread-horse' being a metaphor for the journey of the dead (i.e. for dying), and the 'ash' being its agency, such as I at present decipher this much-debated name. It is the famous 'tree of fate' (*mjǫtviðr*) mentioned in *Vǫluspá* 2, 19, and 47, and if it is identical to the 'gallows-tree' of stanza 42, it would certainly connect the vision of Eggþér and the red roosters with the themes of the poem as a whole (Steinsland 1979, 131).

The idea of rituals associated with hanging has also prompted suggestions of gallows-trees in sacred groves (Nordal 1927, 48, 84) such as the one at the temple of Uppsala described 1076 A.D. by Adam of Bremen (Janson 1998, 24f.) and a possibly similar scene depicted on the 834 A.D. Oseberg tapestry, fragment 4 (Price 2022, 77f., citing Vedeler 2019). The imagery of a tree with several hanged men dangling from its boughs may actually have inspired the term 'gosling-tree' in the R-version by associating the image with a 'goose-tree' known from the so-called 'barnacle goose myth.'[6]

Barnacle geese breed in the Arctic, so their eggs and goslings are not observed in temperate Europe. Thus out of sight from facts, the myth explains how 'barnacle geese' (birds) instead generate from 'goose barnacles' (crustaceans), reciprocally named thus due to certain similar shapes and colour patterns. Goose barnacles can be found attached to driftwood that for instance were imagined to originate from coastal trees 'sprouting' the barnacles. On such living 'goose trees' the goslings would 'hatch' from the shells of the barnacles, 'mature' while still hanging by their beaks on the branches like fruits, eventually fall into the sea, and finally pop up every autumn as adult geese at the North European shores. The folktale entered the world of written records by becoming subject to learned and theological debates throughout medieval Europe (– could such 'veggie-geese' be eaten during Lent?), but the idea of goose-breeding trees may be much older, as might be depicted on a first-century Roman votive stone found in Trier (Hultgård 2019, 90). Illustrations of the barnacle goose myth in medieval topographies and bestiaries testify how the 'gosling trees' could be imagined as similar to 'gallows trees' (Lappo et al. 2019, 10) with goslings resembling hanged people on the boughs, such as the latter may possibly be visualised on the Oseberg tapestry.

[6] If not acquainted with this interesting folktale, I recommend the presentation of its history in the delightful journal *Goose Bulletin* 24 (Lappo et al. 2019, 8–21).

In the R-version, *gaglviðr* ('gosling-tree') thus could refer to the imagined imagery of early variants of the extant 'barnacle goose myth' (which consequently would have been known to the audience of *Vǫluspá* at a certain time), and *gálgviðr* ('gallows-tree') in the H-version might then reveal the image behind this reference. Thus 'gallows-tree' would represent the semantics of both terms, either directly or indirectly. Whatever the origin of *gaglviðr*, the linking of 'gosling' with 'gallows' in Old Norse poetry is confirmed by the late tenth-century *kenning* for (slain) warriors: *hungreyðendr gagls hanga* ('hunger-assuagers of the hanged's gosling') in the skaldic poem *Hákonardrápa* 3. Here, 'gosling' serves as a *heiti* for a carrion bird – an eagle or a raven – associated with the gallows by reference to 'the hanged' (*hangar*) and/or perhaps 'the hanged one' (*hangi*), which is also a name for Óðinn (Heslop 2017, 218).

If the barnacle goose myth is somehow a relevant speculation here and *gagl* not just a scribal error, there is an interesting detail in this context that could have prompted the choice of *gaglviðr* in R: the Old Norse term for barnacle goose is *brandgás* ('burnt goose'). This might be a tie-in with the reference to the red roosters if they were indeed seen to not only herald but also embody the flames burning the gosling-cum-gallows tree.

The Grim Reaper

The strong association of both the roosters and the tree with the dead puts Eggþér and his significance in a new perspective. His position on a *haugr* may not only be that of a lookout post for a herder or a guardian. A *haugr* ('mound') is the usual term for a barrow or grave mound, confirming happy Eggþér's association with death and the realm of the dead – even though it is not exactly a joyful place. Because he is serving a *gýgr*, his cheerful spirits are often seen as *jǫtunn*-glee over the predicted death of the gods. However, like some of the gods, all of the *jǫtnar* are seemingly foreseen to perish in the approaching battle (at least, there is no post-*ragnarǫk* mention of them; cf. Kure 2023, 17) – a foresight that makes an all-out joyful anticipation on Eggþér's part a bit dubious here. Alternatively, he actually may represent the realm of death more than that of the *jǫtnar* – a 'shepherd out of Hel' (*Hel-gjeter*) as Gro Steinsland puts it (1979, 130; cf. Hultgård 2017, 87). The etymology of the term *gýgr* does point up the chthonic and 'hidden' aspects of female *jǫtnar* (de Vries 1962, 196) – aspects that also make *gýgr* a fitting term for the synonymous Hel ('concealer'), the name of the goddess as well as of the realm of the dead in Old Norse mythology referred to in the following stanza. So the goddess Hel could be Eggþér's mistress, and whether the two of them are categorised *jǫtnar* or not seems irrelevant to the present context. Hel's herder might have good reason to be happy: soon the realm of the dead will be filled up (Steinsland 1979, 130).

In fact, 'herding' the dead into Hel may actually be Eggþér's job. Instead of being an odd *jǫtunn*-misfit with no real place in the poem (cf. Nordal 1927, 85), Eggþér may belong to a group of mythical characters or 'mythagonists' well known from myth, folklore, and ritual performance worldwide: the servants or henchmen of Death that dispatch the dead from the land of the living. Eggþér's name ('blade-servant') may hint at an active role in this 'harvesting' of the dead, a cousin of the Breton Ankou and a

possible forerunner of the scythe-wielding Grim Reaper. In that context, we may note an interesting detail about Eggþér's harp, an instrument not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Norse mythical literature.[7] Old Norse *harpa* could hypothetically be a term for a 'harpe' rather than a 'harp'. A harpe – Greek *harpē* (ἅρπη) – is an ancient Grecian type of sword or pole-arm with a sickle- or scythe-shaped blade. The term primarily survived in several Greek myths, where a harpe most famously was wielded by Cronus to castrate Uranus (Hesiod *Theogony* 173–82; in Most 2007, 16–17). If Eggþér strikes a later Nordic version of a harpe, *harpa* (or *harp*?) would be a *hapax legomenon* in the extant Old Norse corpus, but it would not be unparalleled. Old Norse *skálm* 'short sword' (cf. *skálm-ǫld* in *Vǫluspá* 45) comes similarly intact from the equally ancient Thracian-Greek *skálmē* (σκάλμη), which means 'knife, sword'. So even if this admittedly remains highly speculative, it is at least not impossible that Eggþér at some point in the history of the poem could have been imagined to strike up not a harp, but a harpe or scythe, i.e. honing it in preparation for the coming 'harvest', and thus earn his name. However, in contrast with the Grim Reaper, Eggþér is said to be happy – glad, not grim – so in the context of the poem as we know it, his instrument is still most likely a musical harp. We may then wonder about the song it might have been thought to accompany.

Regardless of his instrument, Eggþér's position on a grave mound places him on the threshold between life and death, and he serves a *gýgr*, who may very well be Hel, the Old Norse goddess of the dead. This would likely make him Hel's herder of the deceased, the one to guide or mediate their liminal passage or transcendence through death, the act of dying. We could thus regard Eggþér as a psychopomp or 'Hermes-figure' (*Hermesskikkelse*, Steinsland 1979, 130). In the vision of the *vǫlva* he is centrally placed in connection with a gallows-tree, a tree of executing death that likely could refer to *Yggdrasils askr*, the mythical 'tree of fate' (*mjǫtviðr*). In the tree above and below Eggþér, three roosters in different hues of red are crowing. They portend the advent of *ragnarǫk* and also (I am convinced) embody the fires foreseen to burn the tree at that occasion, as reflected later in *Vǫluspá* 46–47.

A Golden Dawn

The vision of a mythical character sitting in a space surrounded by fires has parallels in the poems *Grímnismál* and *Sigrdrífumál* (Kure 2022, 29f.). In the latter, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa lies dormant like a sleeping beauty within a ghostly burning funeral pyre, untouched by its fires. The hero Sigurðr Fáfnisbani enters this sacred or liminal space and revives her. In return, he receives secret numinous knowledge ('runes') from the valkyrie. In *Grímnismál*, Óðinn, masked as Grímnir, similarly sits waiting between fires that (at the end of the poem) turn out to represent a funeral pyre. On the ninth night, the young prince Agnarr 'takes on the flame' (*tekr á funa*). He enters the space between the fires and offers Óðinn a drink, that is he performs a sacrifice (*blót*). In return, Agnarr also receives numinous knowledge ('the sayings of Grímnir') from the god. Both scenes can

[7] In addition, the only harp appearing in the heroic poetry is the one, which Gunnar struck while dying in a snake-pit (*Atlakviða* 31, *Atlamál* 66, *Oddrúnargrátr* 29; cf. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál* ch. 42).

be understood as poetic renderings as well as performance templates (Gunnell 2016, 99f., 107) for the central 'liminal phase' of an imagined initiation ritual. In such a rite of passage, the initiation candidate or initiand (e.g. Sigurðr or Agnarr) is thought to cross the threshold between life and death after a 'separation phase' in which the initiand symbolically 'dies' or confronts death (e.g. enters a pyre). In myths, the subsequent state of liminality forms a sacred or liminal space, in which the initiand then meets an otherworldly mediator (e.g. a valkyrie or a god). The mediator assists in the acquisition of numinous knowledge that transforms the initiands to be mentally armed for the new state, to which they are being irreversibly 'reborn' in the 'reintegration phase.'[8]

The *vǫlva*'s vision in *Vǫluspá* 42–43 is very similar to the ritual setting of an initiation, such as it may be imagined/performed in *Grímnismál* and *Sigrdrífumál*. Eggþér easily fills the role of an otherworldly mediator, waiting (like a Grímnir/Óðinn) for potential initiands on the threshold between life and death. Three crowing roosters surround him. They herald a change about to occur by the transformative agency of fires, which are here seen to be embodied also by the roosters. Their crowing thus may be thought to take an active, auditory part in performing the change.[9] The heralded transformation is of an existential nature – it is likely a main symbol of fate that burns, the predictable progression of life thus being irreversibly changed. The colours of the roosters would then trace the ritual passage through three levels of burning:

1. The bright-red rooster represents the transformative flames of the pyre engulfing and hiding the liminal space between the fires (cf. the name Fjalarr, 'hider'). This is the 'there' (*þar*) where Eggþér is honing and tuning his instrument, ready to guide or 'herd' the ones that 'take on the flame' in order to transcend the liminal phase of the rite. This space is the centre of the vision, the first in the narrative order, leading on to the next level:
2. The rooster with a flame-shaped, golden comb, crowing over the *æsir*, represents the 'rebirth' or awakening at the divine level, which is to be achieved in the reintegration phase of the ritual. This in turn recalls the state of death from which to be awoken – the level from where the passage initially must arise:
3. The soot-red rooster with an epithet that may refer to glowing charcoal-encased embers at the fade-out of a consummate cremation. This rooster may crow clearance at Hel's hall, and certainly represents death and the phase of separation from the past life – the first in the ritual order.

The fire-theme colours of the roosters transform in an ascending line from soot-red over bright-red to golden, denoting a process of refinery that may also reflect the transformative process of initiation. The crowing of the golden-combed rooster awakes (*vekr*) the initiated chosen ones to the new, elevated consciousness and status of being

[8] On the religious phenomenon of initiation, see Schjødt 2008 for a full treatment with many Old Norse examples, or Kure 2022, 18–22 for a summary.

[9] Perhaps the relation between the verb *gala* ('crow') and the noun *galdr* ('magic spell') is also at play in this performative context (cf. Gunnell 2016, 97).

the 'warriors of Óðinn' (*hǫlðar herjafǫðrs*). It is only in this stage of transcendence that the identity of the present initiands – aspiring young warriors – is finally revealed, and thus completes the vision of the stage for a rite of passage.

So, what is such a vision doing in the middle of *Vǫluspá*? Why is the *vǫlva* telling this to her audience, just before her rendering of *ragnarǫk*? An answer depends on what we think the poem is about, I guess.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the whole of *Vǫluspá* can be read as a didactic mythological speech, which prepares a group of warriors for the ordeals of an initiation ritual (Kure 2023, 14ff.: "*Vǫluspá*'s Frame – The Context"). The sayings and visions of the *vǫlva* can, as a whole, be seen to describe how existence is an intrinsic process of creation and destruction, life and death. This process is guided and developed by means of *ragnarǫk*, understood as "the effects of the gods" (Kure 2023, 9f.). Óðinn plays a crucial role in this ongoing mythical development, achieved individually by turning one's fate into fame. So being initiated into an implied 'odinic brotherhood of arms' is seen to advance a higher status or level both personally, socially, and universally (cf. Nygaard 2019, 67ff.). A group of such Odinic brotherhood aspirants may constitute the imagined front audience of the *vǫlva*. They are the ones to whom she explains the mythological premises and reasoning behind their upcoming rite of passage.

If this is true, the vision of Eggþér and the roosters may be seen to bridge the expected personal ordeals of the audience with the foreseen ordeals of the world. The disruption of fate and the transformation through fire are characteristic of both a personal rite of passage as well as of the cosmological effect of *ragnarǫk*. The same processual thinking behind an initiation ritual can also apply to *ragnarǫk* on a macrocosmic scale. *Ragnarǫk* could in a way be understood as the rite of passage for the world (Kure 2023, 16). This entails that the irreversible change of the world, rendered in the last part of *Vǫluspá*, should not be seen as an aftermath of a catastrophic failure, but rather as an intrinsic part of what *ragnarǫk* is – a consummation of creation consciously achieved by the (sometimes scary) effects of what the gods are and do. Fate, represented among other things in *Vǫluspá* by the name *Yggdrasils askr* 'ash of the dread-horse,' denotes life understood as a journey toward death. The vision of the roosters-cum-fires burning this tree of fate marks a change of the game, which denotes life as an ascendance from death toward an awoken consciousness. The vision then presents us with a more uplifting view of whereto *ragnarǫk* may wilfully lead than the Christian Doomsday in heathen feathers introduced by Snorri's *Edda*.

At the centre of this vision, Eggþér is characterised as *glaðr*. Old Norse *glaðr* denotes 'glad, happy,' but also 'radiant' and the connotations that lead to the place-name Glaðsheimr (the homeworld of Valhǫll 'hall of the chosen slain' according to *Grímnismál* 8) and to English 'glade,' an open clearing of light. Whether Eggþér clears a path with a scythe through the liminal underbrush of interpreted numinous knowledge, or with a harp accompanies a song of such knowledge for the Odinic initiands – like Sigrdrífa's song of runes for Sigurðr in *Sigrdrífumál* – his joy could be seen to spark an encouraging light of hope in a sombre passage of the poem.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Edda: Gylfaginning = Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1988a. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Viking Society for Northern Research.

Edda: Skáldskaparmál = Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1998b. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. Viking Society for Northern Research.

Heslop, Kate, ed. 2017. "Hallfreðr *vandræðaskáld* Óttarsson, *Hákonardrápa* 3." In *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics: Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* 3, edited by Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold, 218. Brepols.

Janson, Henrik. 1998. *Templum Nobilissimum: Adam av Bremen, Uppsalatemplet och konfliktlinjerna i Europa kring år 1075*. Historiska institutionen, Göteborgs universitet.

Most, Glenn W., ed. 2007. Hesiod. *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*. Loeb Classical Library 57. Harvard University Press.

Neckel, Gustav, ed. 1927. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius*. 2. Auflage. Carl Winter.

Secondary Sources

Bugge, Sophus, ed. 1867. *Norræn fornkvæði* [Old Norse poetry]. P. T. Mallings Forlagsboghandel.

Grimm, Jacob. 1835. *Deutsche Mythologie*. Dieterichsche Verlagsbuchhandlung.

Gunnell, Terry. 2013. "*Vǫluspá* in Performance." In *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vǫluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, edited by Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen, 63–77. Brepols.

———. 2016. "Eddic Performance and Eddic Audiences." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, 92–113. Cambridge University Press.

Hultgård, Anders. 2017. *Midgård brinner: Ragnarök i religionhistorisk belysning belysning* [Midgard burns: Ragnarök from the History of Religions perspective]. Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akadamien för svensk folkkultur.

KLE 2019 = Klaus von See†, Beatrice la Farge, and Katja Schulz. 2019. *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda. Band 1: Götterlieder*. Universitätsverlag Winter.

Köhler, Reinhold. 1866. "Der weiße, der rothe und der schwarze Hahn." *Germania* 11: 85–92.

Kure, Henning Haglskær. 2022. "Frigg's Cunning: Initiation in the Framing Myth of *Grímnismál*." In *The Wild Hunt for Numinous Knowledge – Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74: 17–45.

———. 2023. "*Vǫluspá* in a Holistic Reading." In *RMN Newsletter* 17 (2022): 6–19.

———. 2024 (forthcoming). "Loki and the Burnt Heart: The 'Lost' Myth of *Hyndlulióð* 40–41." In *Hybrids and Metamorphoses*, edited by Jan A. Kozák, Marie Novotná, and Jiří Starý. Studia Fennica Folkloristica.

Lappo, E. G., A. B. Popovkina, and J. H. Mooij. 2019. "About Geese Growing on Trees, the Medieval Interpretation of the Barnacle and Brent Goose Origin." *Goose Bulletin* 24: 8–21.

Lindow, John. 2001. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford University Press.

Nordal, Sigurður. 1927. *Völuspá: Vølvens spådom* [*Völuspá:* The Prophecy of the Seeress], translated by Hans Albrectsen. H. Aschehoug & Co. Dansk Forlag.

Nygaard, Simon. 2019. "Being Óðinn Bursson: The Creation of Social and Moral Obligation in Viking Age Warrior-Bands through the Ritualized, Oral Performance of Poetry – the Case of *Grímnismál*." In *Social Norms in Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Jakub Morawiec, Aleksandra Jochymek, and Gregorsz Bartusik, 51–74. Arc Humanities Press.

Orchard, Andy. 1997. *Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*. Cassell.

Price, Neil. 2022. "Performing the Vikings: From Edda to Oseberg." In *The Wild Hunt for Numinous Knowledge – Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74: 63–88.

Salus, Peter H. and Paul Beekman Taylor. 1969. "Eikinskjaldi, Fjalarr, and Eggþér: Notes on Dwarves and Giants in the *Völuspá*." *Neophilologus* 53: 76–81.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2008. *Initiation between Two Worlds*, translated by Victor Hansen. The University Press of Southern Denmark.

Simek, Rudolf. 1993. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, translated by Angela Hall. D. S. Brewer.

Steinsland, Gro. 1979. "Treet i Vǫluspá" [The tree in *Vǫluspá*]. *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 94: 120–50.

Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht. 2006. *Kapitler af Nordens litteratur i oldtid og middelalder* [Chapters of Nordic literature in Antiquity and the Middle Ages]. Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

Vedeler, Marianne. 2019. *The Oseberg Tapestries*. Scandinavian Academic Press.

de Vries, Jan. 1962. *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2. verbesserte Auflage. E. J. Brill.

NERTHUS F. > *NJǪRÐR* M.: A SPECULATIVE PROPOSAL

Stefan Brink*

One of the most enigmatic problems regarding Old Norse mythology is how to understand the West Scandinavian god *Njǫrðr*, in the light of the East Scandinavian goddess(?) *Niærþer* and a Proto-Germanic goddess *Nerthus*, mentioned by Tacitus in his *Germania* (AD c. 98; chap. 40) and which according to him was worshipped by several Germanic tribes, such as the Reudingi, Aviones, Anglii, Varini, Eudoses, Suarini and Nuitones.[1] All three names can be derived from a PGmc **Nerþuz*.

The etymological background to **Nerþuz* is disputed (see e.g. de Vries 1962, 410–11); a popular alternative seems to be to compare a Proto-Nordic **nerþu-* with Old Irish *nert* 'power, might,' as a background to a word **nerþuʀ* with the same meaning, to be derived from a PIE root **ner-* 'power, might, force; man' with a **-tu-* suffix (Benveniste 1948, 112; Polomé 1954; Bader 1986; Pokorny 1994, s.v. *ner-*(*t-*)). This word would then have been used – as a noa name(?) – for a female(?) deity **Nerþuʀ* (< **Nerþuz*) in Proto-Nordic time(?) (see e.g. de Vries *loc. cit*.; Sahlgren 1918, 20; cf. also Vikstrand 2001, 94).

We actually know very little of Njǫrðr. In the Old Norse literature, especially some poems in the *Poetic Edda* (such as *Grímnismál*, *Skírnismál*, *Þrymskviða*), Njǫrðr is described as a member of the *Vanir* family and the father of Freyr and Freyja, and he is married to Skaði, a giant's daughter. Snorri Sturluson, in his *Edda*, says that Njǫrðr ruled over the wind and the sea and was some kind of protector of fishermen and seafarers, and he lives by the sea in *Nóatún* (*Grímnismál* 16), which has the meaning of 'the ship house (maybe *naust*?)' (de Vries 1962, 411; Bjorvand and Lindeman 2007, 785). From Old

* Professor of Scandinavian Studies, Institute for Northern Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands.

[1] For an often neglected but important contribution to the possible geographical locations of tribes mentioned by Tacitus, see Malone 1934; see also Much 1967; Timpe 1988; 1992a; 1992b and Birley 1999, 126–27.

Icelandic literature, we thus get the impression that Njǫrðr has an obvious connection to the sea.

The god Nerthus that Tacitus describes was an earth goddess (*Terram matrem*), who had the function of protecting agrarian communities and securing good growth and prosperity for society. A major event in the cult of this female deity seems to have been an annual ritual, an elaborate procession ritual whereby a wagon, which was kept and hidden in a sacred grove on an island, once a year was taken out, drawn by cows and with an image of the goddess. The cart proceeded around to the communities, where ritual ceremonies took place. After the procession, the cart was driven back to the holy island, where the image of the goddess and the cart were ritually washed in a lake, whereafter the slaves that had conducted the journey and the washing were executed and drowned in the lake. There can be no doubt but that what Tacitus describes is a 'Mother Earth' deity connected to the land, a deity through whose worship good growth of arable land and livestock is secured, and a deity capable of offering prosperity to agrarian communities (Tacitus *Germania* ch. 40; see Birley 1999 and Rives 1999).

For obvious reasons, this account by Tacitus has been highlighted and discussed extensively, something I will not dwell upon here.[2] Instead, I note that Old Norse scholars' perceptions of this enigmatic deity cannot be said to be in agreement. It would be an insurmountable task to attempt to provide in a fair way an account of all the interpretations from the past two centuries, as well as the discussion currently underway, concerning how scholars have understood this deity, and especially the gender problem that we must deal with. Therefore, I rest my case by citing two Old Norse mythological experts who give a summary of the research so far in their handbooks.

John Lindow (2001) discusses these matters under two entries, *Nerthus* (pp. 237–38) and *Njörd* (pp. 241–43). The latter male god is described by using Snorri's characterisation of the god and what we know from the mythological content of several Eddic poems. Lindow notes that in a myth in *Skáldskaparmál*, involving Njǫrðr, the giantess Skaði, and Loki, Njǫrðr is described as being "feminized," and he ends with a reflection: "Reading this scene against the myth of Skadi's choice of Njörd would accord directly with the gender inversions there. It is also worth pointing out that the name 'Skadi' is grammatically masculine." And here we come to the core of what I want to discuss here, the sex of the deity. Lindow's take on this problem (2001, 242–43) runs thus:

> The name "Njörd" can be derived etymologically from that of Nerthus, the goddess […]. The etymological equivalence can suggest either that some time during the first millennium the sex of the deity changed, that the deity was hermaphroditic, or, perhaps most likely, that there was once a male-female pair, like Frey and Freyja, with identical or nearly identical names.

When Lindow (2001, 237–38) discusses the goddess Nerthus, he is somewhat more explicit. He notes that Tacitus' form *Nerthus* is exactly the same form as ON *Njǫrðr* and

[2] For a recent discussion of the historiography, see Rives 1999.

adds that the change of a female *Nerthus* to a male *Njǫrðr* can be explained in several ways:

> It seems to be perfectly possible that even in *Nerþus a male and a female goddess were worshipped, as is the case in the (probably younger) brother and sister Freyr/Freyja. Another possibility would be that *Nerþus was a hermaphrodite deity. The usage of the plural of the god's name Njǫrðr, which occurs in several skaldic poems, points to the first solution. The fact that the masculine and feminine of the grammatical u-stems fall together means that a formal differentiation according to the gender becomes impossible.

This idea, that Nerthus actually represented not one, but two deities, one male and one female, hence bearing the same name, was presented already in 1896 by Axel Koch, who came up with the solution that Nerthus actually was a pair of gods, one female Nerthus and one male Nerthus. Koch elaborates on this idea by pointing out that in the long run, it was impossible to maintain one name for two different deities, wherefore he develops his hypothesis by assuming the male deity gradually was renamed *Njǫrðr freyr* 'Nerthus the Lord' and the female one *Njǫrðr freyja* 'Nerthus the mistress,' which would explain the emergence of these two (new) deities. The further line of thought in Koch's hypothesis is perhaps even more farfetched in that after a partition of *Njǫrðr freyr* into two separate names *Njǫrðr* and *Freyr*, and the same then for the female equivalent, the name *Njǫrðr* (again!) became the name for both a male and a female deity. But since the feminine *u*-stems were so few (a theme developed below) and eventually adapted to the masculine *u*-stems, *Njǫrðr* became, in the Old Norse world, a male deity.

Few have followed Koch's idea (however, cp. Lindow's discussion above of Nerthus being both a male and a female deity), and it was early on criticised by Jöran Sahlgren (1918), who instead tried to solve the problem by deriving the name *Nerthus* from a masculine *u*-stem, *nerþuz* 'power, might,' and assuming that Tacitus (wrongly then) did identify a *Terra Mater* deity with a male fertility god. Why *Njǫrðr* became a male god in the Old Norse world was, according to Sahlgren, a result of Snorri and his predecessors, trying to systematise the mythological world, whereby they, on formal grammatical grounds, comprehended *Njǫrðr* as a male god. Sahlgren however links up with Koch's hypothesis, in that he supposed *Nerthus* gradually became a tabu name, a noa name, as a result of which new names had to be introduced, namely *Freyr* and *Freyja*. Modern scholars seldom pay any attention to Koch's and Sahlgren's early attempts at solving our conundrum (although some basic ideas linger on, as we have seen). However, I will develop Kock's idea below (see also Vikstrand 2001, 101).

Rudy Simek (1993, 233–34) reiterates what is described of Njǫrðr's nature in the Old Norse literature and concludes that despite the "extremely poor picture we have of Njǫrðr as reflected in Old Norse literature Njǫrðr would appear to have had a significant position in the cult of the Vanir[3] in Germanic antiquity." As for the question of the sex of this deity, Simek writes: "The change of sex from Nerthus to Njǫrðr can presumably be explained by the fact that with *Nerþuz either a hermaphrodite deity was meant or

[3] Who, by the way, Simek (2010) lately has 'dismissed' (see below)!

else, more likely, a divine brother and sister (like Freyr and Freyja)." Again, we can see the old leaven from Koch et al. which assumes the existence of either a hermaphroditic deity or rather a divine pair, a male and a female deity, sharing the same name (*Nerþuz*).[4]

I have touched upon the formal aspect of the names *Nerthus*, *Njǫrðr* and *Niærþer* already. Normally, *Nerthus* (< **Nerþuz*) has been perceived as a feminine *u*-stem. This grammatical category appears to have been represented by a very tiny group of words, showing only reminiscences in their inflection in literary times, such as ON *hǫnd* (cf. Goth. *handus*) appearing with the dative *hendi* (Wessén 1966, 64–65; Iversen 1972, 61). This small group, the feminine *u*-stems,[5] eventually adapted to the masculine *u*-stem paradigm, already in preliterary times (Wessén 1927, *passim*; Lindquist 1936), and, as we have seen above, this grammatical change has been used by some as an explanation for the change of sex for the god *Njǫrðr*.

The most extensive examination to date of the *Njǫrðr—Niærþer* problem has been conducted by Per Vikstrand (2001), who discusses the different theories presented thus far and comments in particular on the fact that in Swedish onomastic tradition, we count on a female **Niærþer* in place names such as *Norderön*, *Närtuna*, *Närlunda* etc. an idea first proposed by Magnus Olsen (1905; 1909; 1915) and subsequently developed by Elias Wessén (1921; 1922), who found *Niærþer* names often occurring with another theophoric place name of a male god, esp. *Ullr*, close by, making of these two a kind of a pair of gods, one male and one female, a pair of deities of the opposite sex that disclosed a fertility cult.[6] Vikstrand raises an interesting idea, which already John Lindow (above) touched upon, noting that the grammatical gender of *Njǫrðr*'s partner *Skaði* is masculine. He notes – following Sahlgren's critique of Koch's idea – that it seems rather improbable that a change in the grammatical paradigm system would have been able to influence the sex of a 'living' deity. However, for a god, who is becoming obsolete and whose character is fading out, as is obvious regarding *Njǫrðr* according to the Old Norse literature, it may be possible to reconcile this change of sex. The myth in which *Njǫrðr* marries a giantess with the name *Skaði*, which inflects as a masculine, might reflect an

[4] Similarly in his edition, Rives (1999, 2939) summarises the scholarly discussion of the Old Norse tradition of Njǫrðr: "He [Njǫrðr] was one of the Vanir [...] and usually considered ancient fertility deities. But although his son Freyr was in Eddic tradition the chief fertility god, Njǫrðr himself was associated more with seafaring: his home was Nóatún, 'Shipstead', and Snorri says that he ruled over the wind and the sea and was called upon to aid fishermen and sailors. […] This association with the sea does not fit well with the description of Nerthus as Mother Earth […]. A bigger problem is the change of sex from Nerthus to Njǫrðr. This has been explained in many different ways: some scholars link it to the 'masculinisation' of agriculture in the period between Roman and Viking times, whereas others have suggested that Nerthus was originally a hermaphroditic deity. The most plausible suggestion is that there were two deities, a male and female, similar to Njǫrðr's children Freyr and Freyja […]. But the problem is still not satisfactorily resolved."

[5] As Kock 1896, 291, Wright 1954, § 201–5 and Braune 1973 § 104–6 remark (cf. Rømer 1981, 36–37), only four nouns in Gothic declined as fem. *u*-stems: *handus* 'hand,' *asilus* 'she-ass,' *kinnus* 'cheek' and *waddjus* 'wall' (Wright and Braune *loc. cit.*), and one, ON *fé* (Goth. *faihu*, PGmc *féhu*), declined as a neut. *u*-stem.

[6] The theory of a pair of deities in close vicinity, indicating a fertility cult, was picked up by Lars Hellberg (e.g. 1986, 53, 67 and *passim*) and others, but was strongly refuted by Jöran Sahlgren (e.g. 1950). Per Vikstrand (2001, 102–6) gives a comprehensive overview of this cult-pair theory.

earlier situation where we had a female *Njǫrðr* and a male giant *Skaði* (Vikstrand 2001, 101).

Following this review of theories, so far, for explaining the sex – masculine or feminine – of a deity (or two!) to be derived from PGmc **Nerþuz*, whether 1) a hermaphrodite, 2) actually two deities with the same name, 3) as the result of a grammatical change (because the feminine *u*-stem adapted to the masculine *u*-stems), or 4) disclosing an ancient deity couple, *Njǫrðr* f.—*Skaði* m., I will introduce a new hypothesis, which is not of a grammatical kind etc., but is based on the actual cult of this deity.

My hypothesis rests upon four preconditions:

1) That the account of Nerthus as rendered by Tacitus is one that is at least reliable to the point that it suggests the existence of a deity by this name? (Even though the MSS variances are many, and Jacob Grimm chose Nerthus over other spellings precisely because it matches with *Njǫrðr* and his idea of a coherent "pan-Germanic" mythology).
2) That there was a difference between the *Vanir* (Njǫrðr, Freyr and Freyja) and the *Æsir* (Óðinn, Þórr etc.) regarding their cult. This aspect was especially discussed and highlighted after Simek's attempt to 'dismiss' the *Vanir* as a special 'race' among the gods and goddesses in the Old Norse pantheon, which led to a discussion by Clive Tolley (2011), Jens Peter Schjødt (2014) and Terry Gunnell (2017). When trying to understand the imbued characteristics or qualities and the cults of these deities, Terry Gunnell in particular emphasises potentially different cults, in that the *Vanir*, according to many sources, had a cult which was based in the landscape, "ideas of physical connection between Vanir gods and landscape" (Gunnell 2017, 124). So, for example, the *Vanir* god Freyr seems to have been important in a cult with regard to fertility, which, as Gunnell emphasises, "adds weight to the idea of the god's close connection with particular spaces in the local living environment" (2017, 119). The *Vanir*, Gunnell continues, are "depicted as being more directly bound up with particular *holy sites in the landscape*" (2017, 122; Gunnell's italics), and he ends this discussion by summarising: "both the oral tradition described in this article and the recent archaeological evidence suggest that the religious activities and belief of the Vanir (centred in Sweden) had a slightly different nature, and perhaps a different origin to those connected to Æsir gods like Þórr and Óðinn" (2017, 130). Gunnell also hints at the possibilities of East Scandinavia (*Svíþjóð*) having had other cultic traditions, perceived as 'other' to Snorri and other Icelanders, where a cult of the *Vanir* was, according to esp. place names, widespread.
3) The third precondition for my hypothesis can be seen as a consequence of Gunnell's discussion above, namely that a cult (with its rituals) and a mythology are shaped by, and more importantly, have 'responded' to the environment where people lived, which then becomes a reciprocal reaction to the living conditions. The 'religion' becomes defined by the physical needs of the people (cf. Nordberg 2022) and the metaphysical needs for explanation to inexplicable features and

experiences (creating, for example, explanatory myths, cf. Brink 2001). Hence, for me, the Old Norse 'religion' is very much culturally and landscape-based. I have previously discussed this point (Brink 2004), by highlighting the different perceptions of what is 'dangerous' and what is 'safe space,' thus what was a 'civilised' space, a response to the idea of a dichotomy Miðgarðr—Útgarðr and that in the Old Norse world, a forest was considered to be a dangerous, unsafe space. By contrasting myths, terminology and creation stories in Icelandic sources with the creation myths described in the Finnish Kalevala, one finds that in the former culture, the outback, the forest is unsafe and an 'uncivilised' space (cf. a *skógarmaðr* etc.), whereas in Kalevala's creational myths, the world starts with an island in a sea, then land is cultivated and finally, as the crown of the creation, come trees and forests; the forests and the woodland becomes their 'civilised' (thus 'safe') space. In both cases a response in their mythology and 'religion' to the natural preconditions, their environment (for a productive discussion on how to define an Old Norse 'religion,' see e.g. Nordberg 2012; Schjødt 2012; Gunnell 2015, 56–58 and Olof Sundqvist 2024, 27–30).

4) The fourth precondition rests upon the fact that *Nerthus*, which probably (or certainly) is to – as was mentioned – be seen as a feminine *u*-stem, later on, in the early Old Norse period, could undergo a change in gender, due to the fact that the feminine *u*-stems adapted to the masculine *u*-stem inflection already in preliterary time.

First of all, it is notable that the cult of **Nerþuz* in Scandinavia, according to the theophoric place names, is found in two distinct regions regarding their occurrence, namely in central *Svíþjóð*, around Lake Mälaren, and in a few *Svía*-dominated regions (Östergötland, Jämtland). The other region is western Norway: Rogaland, Hordaland and Møre, with some scattered locations around Viken in the east.

The problem with the potential *Njǫrðr* place-names in Western Norway is that several of them, which had earlier been proposed to contain this god's name, have very young forms, which makes them more or less impossible to interpret etymologically, such as *Nærland* in Nærbø, Rogaland (Nordelandh c. 1520), *Nørland* in Masfjorden, Hordaland (Nerdeelandt c. 1520), *Nerland* in Eresfjord, Møre (Nordlandæ *Aslak Bolts Jordebog*), ?*Nardo* in Strinda, Sør-Trøndelag (i Nirdole *Aslak Bolts Jordebog*), *Næreim* in Suldal, Rogaland (Nerenn, Nerem 1567, Nwrrimb 1602, Nerim 1610) and *Nærem* in Sylte, Møre (af Nerdheime *Aslak Bolts Jordebog*) (cf. Brink 2007, 128). If we only had these forms, for names which potentially could contain Njǫrðr's name as a first element, it would be considered impossible or extremely uncertain (or rather frivolous) to suggest such an interpretation. Instead, one would rather expect an interpreter to suggest the adv. *nǫrðr* ('north') in these cases, or more cautiously, to remark that the first element is obscure. However, there are several names in Norway, which appear to contain the god Njǫrðr's name, such as the *vin*-name *Nerdrum* in Fet, Akershus (in Niærdarini 1363), the *hof*-names *Norderhov* in Løiten, Hedmark (a Nærdrhofue 1370), and *Norderhov*, parish and 'herred' in Buskerud (Nierdarhofs *Røde Bog*, a Nyærdærogue 1345), a name in *-land*,

Nærland in Finnø, Rogaland (Niærdaland 1308), and two names in *-heim*, *Nalum* in Brunlanes, Vestfold (Næiardheim Røde Bog) and *Nereim* in Fjelberg, Hordaland (Niardhæims sokn 1326). Two of these, *Nærland* and *Nereim*, are found in the West, and their early forms perhaps functioned as a kind of 'platform' for the editors of the *Norske gaardnavne* volumes of Rogaland and Hordaland, Oluf Rygh and Magnus Olsen, to dare suggest that *Njǫrðr* was behind first elements such as *Norde-*, *Nerde-*, *Nord-*, *Ner-* and *Nerd-* found in the same area. But let us, for the sake of argument, assume Rygh and Olsen are right in their interpretation, in which case, we have eight (of potentially 13 Norwegian) *Njǫrðr*-names to be found in Western Norway.

Thus, coming back to the second and third preconditions of my hypothesis, that a 'religion' mirrors the environmental preconditions of people, so that if people live in an agrarian society, mainly based on open-landscape agriculture with arable fields, one would expect their "religion" to contain cult and rituals to promote good harvests, hence *ár ok friðr*, rain (in measured proportions and times!) etc.; for a society based on livestock husbandry in a forest region, one would expect their 'religion' to contain myths to explain and rituals to prevent dangerous aspects which could be detrimental for their livelihood, such as wildfires, wild animals (such as wolves, wolverines and bears), etc. It is in such areas we find the occurrence of noa names for wild animals, such as *gråben* (grey leg) and earlier *vargr* 'killer, slaughterer' etc. for a wolf, and for the bear, ON *bjǫrn* m. – actually, itself being an old taboo name for the animal, with the meaning 'the brown one' – we find noa names in the folklore such as *styggnacke* 'the mean neck,' *fulingen* 'the hireling' etc. (Sahlgren 1918; Lockwood 1955; Jacoby 1974; Allan and Burridge 2009; Allan 2018). A 'religion' thus adapts and adjusts to the environmental preconditions. Therefore, for a fishing community, a sea-based culture dependent on what the sea can provide, one would in the same way assume their 'religion' would mirror the needs and potential dangers of importance for their livelihood and survival.

In the fjord landscape of Western Norway, with long and deep fjords surrounded by high and steep mountainsides, and with limited arable land for cultivation, this culture was dependent on what the sea could provide, supplemented by some animal husbandry, with collecting hay fodder wherever grass was growing and keeping the cattle up in the mountain areas on seters (shielings) during summertime. The sea was dangerous for the fishermen due to weather, and unpredictable regarding the catch of fish and the occurrence of seals and whales. These preconditions one would expect would be mirrored in their 'religion.'

My hypothesis results in the proposal that the 'religion' in e.g. Denmark, Skåne and central Sweden, with an open landscape with arable fields, was adapted to these living conditions, resulting in an agrarian society with a 'religion' mirroring these preconditions, in a way which was discussed by Terry Gunnell as noted in my second precondition, exemplified by a fertility cult including Freyr and Freyja, providing for *ár ok friðr*, good harvest and healthy and fertile livestock. In the same way, I propose that the 'religion' in Western Norway, with its different environmental and climate preconditions, had a 'religion' which was more suitable for those living there, where

good growth on arable land was not their main focus, but instead what the sea could provide for their livelihood.

If my hypothesis is valid, then the old tradition and conception of a goddess OSw **Niærþer* in central Sweden, found in several place names around Lake Mälaren, actually has a historical basis. In this area, 'fertility' goddess, a *Terra Mater*, chimes well with what is expected for a cult of a deity in an agrarian society. In Western Norway this Pan-Germanic deity, originally a feminine *u*-stem **Nerþuz*, was adapted to the special environmental preconditions here, and my third precondition, regarding the disappearance of the feminine *u*-stems and the move and adaptation to the masculine *u*-stems, led to a natural shift for a **Njǫrðr* f. > *Njǫrðr* m., with a change of sex and also an adaptation for the deity to the natural environment of Western Norway, thus turning into a god linked to the sea.

Gabriel Turville-Petre (1935, 322) touched upon this idea. He writes: "We are told he [Njǫrðr] rules over the sea, he is very wealthy, and that fishermen must invoke his aid. It seems, therefore, that the figure of Njordr has been transferred from that of ruler of the soil and its fertility to that of a sea-god," and he continues "It has, therefore, been suggested that in the case of Njordr, instead of changing the declination, the Scandinavians changed the sex of the deity" (1935, 322). I might add that we will probably never find out which came first in this 'hen and the egg'-conundrum; was it the change of sex or the grammatical gender?

My hypothesis results in the existence of a female (fertility) deity in Eastern Scandinavia, with a cult and rituals suitable for an agrarian culture, and a male deity in Western Scandinavia, a sea god, with a cult and rituals appropriate for this environment. One possibility could be that these two deities sprung from one Pan-Germanic deity **Nerþuz* f., which evolved into two different deities in Scandinavia, probably (or rather certainly) before the Viking Age, one *Terra Mater* ('fertility') goddess in Eastern Scandinavia, OSw *Niærþer* (and potentially ODa **Niærther*), and a sea god *Njǫrðr* in the North Atlantic Old Norse world, which, for some reason had a change of sex (probably due to grammatical reasons, discussed above).[7] Another possibility would be that there existed two gods, already during Tacitus' time, a male **Nerþuz* m. and a female **Nerþuz* f., of which we are told by Tacitus only of the latter, and that the female **Nerþuz* f. had a cult in Eastern Scandinavia (due to environmental preconditions – *Terra Mater*) and the male **Nerþuz* m. in Western Scandinavia. And one cannot dismiss Vikstrand's idea of an ancient, obsolete goddess *Njǫrðr* f., married to a giant *Skaði* m., with a change of gender.

Anyway, my main point is that cults and rituals accommodated environmental conditions and the way people utilised the natural conditions for their existence, whether an agrarian culture with agriculture, animal husbandry in forest regions or fishing and hunting in the sea.[8]

[7] The question is if we are to place the five potential **Nerþuz* names in eastern Norway in the former or the latter group, but this discussion can perhaps be postponed to another time.

[8] I am grateful for many valuable comments from Professor Stephen A. Mitchell, Harvard, who read a draft of this article.

Abbreviations

Goth. Gothic
ODa Old Danish
ON Old Norse
OSw Old Swedish
PGmc Proto-Germanic
PIE Proto-Indo-European

Bibliography

Allan, Keith, ed. 2018. *The Oxford Handbook of Taboo Words and Language*. Oxford University Press.

Allan, Keith, and Kate Burridge. 2009. *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge University Press.

Bader, Françoise. 1986. "An I. E. Myth of Immersion-Emergence." *The Journal of Indo-European Studies* 14: 40–123.

Benveniste, Émile. 1948. *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en indo-européen*. Adrien-Maisonneuve.

Birley, Anthony R., ed. 1999. *Tacitus Agricola and Germany*, transl. with intro and notes. Oxford University Press.

Bjorvand, Harald, and Fredrik Otto Lindeman. 2007. *Våre arveord: Etymologisk ordbok* [Our inherited words: An etymological dictionary]. Revised and extended edition. Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning, Serie B: Skrifter 105. Novus.

Braune, Wilhelm. 1973. *Gotische Grammatik*. 18th edition by Ernst A. Ebbinghaus. Sammlung kurzer Grammatiken germanischer Dialekte A:1. Max Niemeyer Verlag.

Brink, Stefan. 2001. "Mythologizing Landscape: Place and Space of Cult and Myth." In *Kontinuitäten und Brüche in der Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Anders Hultgård zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 23.12.2001*, edited by Michael Stausberg, 76–112. Ergänzungsband zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 31. De Gruyter.

———. 2004. "Mytologiska rum och eskatologiska föreställningar i det vikingatida Norden" [Mythological spaces and eschatological notions in the Viking Age Nordic region]. In *Ordning mot kaos: Studier av nordisk förkristen kosmologi* [Order against chaos: Studies on Norse Pre-Christian Cosmology], edited by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere, 291–316. Vägar till Midgård 4. Nordic Academic Press.

———. 2007. "How Uniform Was the Old Norse Religion?" In *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, edited by Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop and Tarrin Wills, 105–36. Studies in the Early Middle Ages. Brepols.

Gunnell, Terry. 2015. "Pantheon? What Pantheon? Concepts of a Family of Gods in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions." *Scripta Islandica* 66: 55–76.

———. 2017. "Blótgyðjur, Goðar, Mimi, Incest, and Wagons: Oral Memories of the Religion(s)of the Vanir." In *Old Norse Mythology – Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell and Jens Peter Schjødt. Harvard University Press.

Hellberg, Lars. 1986. "Hedendomens spår i uppländska ortnamn" [Traces of paganism in Upplandic place names]. *Ortnamnssällskapets i Uppsala årsskrift*: 40–71.

Iversen, Ragnvald. 1972. *Norrøn grammatik* [Norse grammar]. 7th edition by. E. F. Halvorsen. Aschehoug.

Jacoby, Michael. 1974. *Wargus*, vargr, *Verbrecher, Wolf: Eine sprach- und rechtsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Koch, Axel. 1896. "Die Göttin Nerthus und der Gott Niorþr." *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 28: 289–94.

Lindow, John. 2001. *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford University Press.

Lindquist, Ivar. 1936. "Egendomliga *u*-stammar." In *Bidrag till nordisk filologi tillägnade Emil Olson den 9 juni 1936* [Contribution to Norse philology dedicated to Emil Olson on 9th June 1936]. Gleerup.

Lockwood, W. B. 1955. "Word Taboo in the Language of the Faroese Fishermen." *Transactions of the Philological Society* 54: 1–24.

Malone, Kemp. 1934. "The Votaries of Tacitus." *Namn och bygd* 22: 26–51.

Much, Rudolf. 1967. *Die Germania des Tacitus*. 3rd edition by H. Jankuhn and W. Lange. Germanische Bibliothek, Abteilung 1: Sammlung germanischer Elementar- und Handbücher 5, Altertumskunde 3. Winter.

Nordberg, Andreas. 2012. "Continuity, Change and Regional Variation in Old Norse Religion." In *More than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions*, edited by Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt, 119–51. Nordic Academic Press.

———. 2022. "Some Thoughts on the Category of Religion in Research of Viking Age Scandinavia." In *Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries in Studies of the Viking Age*, edited by Daniel Sävborg, 253–76. Brepols.

Olsen, Magnus. 1905. *Det gamle norske ønavn Njarðarlǫg* [The Old Norwegian island name *Njarðarlǫg*]. Christiania videnskabs-selskabs forhandlinger 109, no. 5.

———. 1909. "Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus" [On Old Norse myth and cult]. *Maal og minne:* 17–36.

———. 1915. *Hedenske kultminder i norske stedsnavne* [Pagan cult monuments in Norse place names]. Videnskapsselskapets skrifter 1, Hist.–filos. klasse 1914, no. 4.

Pokorny, Julius. 1994. *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 3rd edition. Francke.

Polomé, Edgar C. 1954. "A propos de la déesse Nerthus." *Latomus* 13: 167–200.

Rives, J. B., ed. 1999. *Tacitus Germania*, transl. with intro. and com. Clarendon Press.

Rømer, Kirsten. 1981. "En sammenligning mellem de gotiske og de oldhøjtyske substantiver med et appendiks om den old- og middelhøjtyske substantivfleksion"

[A comparison between Gothic and Old High German nouns with an appendix on the Old and Middle High German noun inflection]. In *Sammenlignende studier i Gotisk* [Comparative studies on Gothic], edited by Hans Frede Nielsen. Mindre skrifter udg. af Laboratorium for folkesproglig Middelalderlitteratur ved Odense Universitet 1981, no. 5. Odense universitet.

Rygh, Oluf, et al., eds. 1897–1936. *Norske Gaardnavne* [Norwegian farm names]. 19 vols. Cammermeyer.

Sahlgren, Jöran. 1918. "Förbjudna namn" [Forbidden names]. *Namn och bygd* 6: 1–40.

———. 1950. "Hednisk gudalära och nordiska ortnamn: Kritiska inlägg" [Pagan beliefs and Nordic place names: Critical contributions]. *Namn och bygd* 38: 1–37.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2012. "Reflections on Aims and Methods in the Study of Old Norse Religion." In *More than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions*, edited by Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt, 263–87. Nordic Academic Press.

———. 2014. "New Perspectives on the Vanir Gods in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Mythology and Religion." In *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Interactions, and Institutions*, edited by Timothy R. Tangherlini, 19–34. The Wildcat Canyon Advanced Seminars: Mythology 1. North Pinehurst Press.

Simek, Rudolf. 1993. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, transl. by Angela. D. S. Brewer.

———. 2010. "The Vanir: An Obituary." *RMN Newsletter* 1: 10–19.

Sundqvist, Olof. 2024. *The Demise of Norse Religion: Dismantling and Defending the Old Order in Viking Age Scandinavia*. De Gruyter.

Timpe, Dieter. 1988. "Zum politischen Charakter der Germanen in der 'Germania' des Tacitus." In *Alte Geschichte und Wissenschaftsgeschichte: Festschrift für Karl Christ zum 65.* Geburtstag, edited by Peter Kneissl and Volker Losemann, 502–25. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

———. 1992a. "Der Sueben-Begriff bei Tacitus." In *Beiträge zum Verständnis der Germania des Tacitus: Bericht über die Kolloquien der Kommission für die Altertumskunde nord- und mitteleuropas im Jahr 1986*, vol. 2, edited by Günter Neumann and Henning Seemann, 278–310. Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse, F. 3, 195. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

———. 1992b. "'Tacitus' Germania als religionsgeschichtliche Quelle." In *Germanische Religionsgeschichte: Quellen und Quellenprobleme*, edited by Henrich Beck et al., 434–85. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde 5. De Gruyter.

Tolley, Clive. 2011. "In Defence of the Vanir." *RMN Newsletter* 2: 20–8.

Turville-Petre, Gabriel. 1935. "The Cult of Freyr in the Evening of Paganism." *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society* 3: 317–33.

Vikstrand, Per. 2001. *Gudarnas platser: Förkristna sakrala ortnamn i Mälarområdet* [Places of the gods: Pre-Christian sacred place names in the Mälar region]. Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi 77. Kungl. Gustav Adolfs akademi.

de Vries, Jan. 1962. *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. 2nd edition. Brill.

Wessén, Elias. 1921. “Forntida gudsdyrkan i Östergötland 1” [Ancient beliefs in Östergötland 1]. *Meddelanden från Östergötlands fornminnes- och museiförening:* 85–147.

———. 1922. “Forntida gudsdyrkan i Östergötland 2” [Ancient beliefs in Östergötland 12. *Meddelanden från Östergötlands fornminnes- och museiförening:* 1–48.

———. 1927. “Till de feminina substantivböjningarnas historia” [On the history of feminine noun declensions]. *Festskrift till Hjalmar Falk 30. desember 1927 fra elever, venner og kolleger* [Festschrift for Hjalmar Falk on the 30th December 1927, by students, friends and colleagues], 78–111. Aschehoug.

———. 1966. *Isländsk grammatik* [Icelandic grammar]. 2nd edition. Norstedts.

Wright, Joseph. 1954. *Grammar of the Gothic Language*. 2nd edition by O. L. Sayce. Clarendon Press.

HYRROKKIN – MONSTER OR MIGHTY PRIESTESS?

Ingunn Ásdísardóttir*

A Festschrift in honour of Terry Gunnell? That's not a bad idea from my perspective – since for the past two decades my life would have been radically different if it had not been for Terry's unending encouragement, patience and academic demands.

Due to the wonderfully large number of contributors (resulting in an amazing Festschrift), and being one of the editors of the book, only a very short contribution will come from me, followed by a picture (Fig. 1) of the cover of the 2024 publication of my 2018 PhD research under Terry's supervision in revised and stepped-up form (in Icelandic).

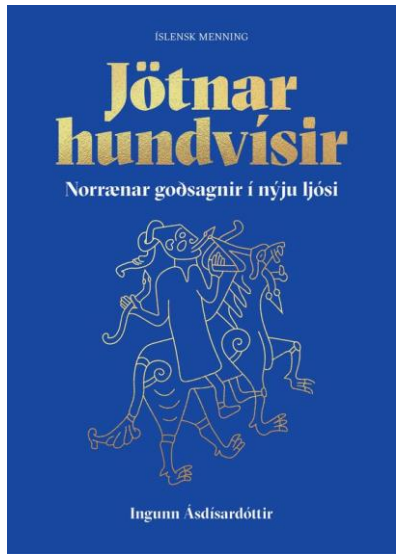


Figure 1.

* Independent scholar, The ReykjavíkAcademy.

I will here present a suggestion, based on the comparison of two sources, about the role of a *jǫtunn*-woman at Baldr's funeral. The two sources are Snorri Sturluson's description in *Gylfaginning* and two stanzas of Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*.

Gylfaginning	***Húsdrápa* 10–11**
En Æsirnir tóku lík Baldrs ok fluttu til sævar. Hringhorni hét skip Baldrs. Hann var allra skipa mestr. Hann vildu goðin fram setja ok gera þar á bálfǫr Baldrs. En skipit gekk hvergi fram. **Þá var sent í Jǫtunheima eptir gýgi þeiri er Hyrrokkin hét. En er hon kom ok reið vargi ok hafði hǫggorm at taumum þá hljóp hon af hestinum, en Óðinn kallaði til berserki fjóra at gæta hestsins, ok fengu þeir eigi haldit nema þeir feldi hann. Þá gekk Hyrrokkin á framstafn nǫkkvans ok hratt fram í fyrsta viðbragði svá at eldr hraut ór hlunnunum ok lǫnd ǫll skulfu.** Þá varð Þórr reiðr ok greip hamarinn ok myndi þá brjóta hǫfuð hennar áðr en goðin öll báðu henni friðar. Þá var borit út á skipit lík Baldrs, ok er þat sá kona hans Nanna Nepsdóttir þá sprakk hon af harmi ok dó. Var hon borin á bálit og slegit í eldi. Þá stóð Þórr at ok vígði bálit með Mjǫllni. … Hestr Baldrs var leiddr á bálit með ǫllu reiði. (Faulkes 1988, 46–47)	Þar hykk sigrunni svinnum sylgs valkyrjur fylgja heilags tafns ok hrafna. … *Húsdrápa* 10 Der ved jeg at valkyrjerne ledsager den kloge kriger [Odin] og ravnene til det hellige ligs blod osv. (Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B I:129) *'There I believe valkyries and ravens follow the wise victory-tree [WARRIOR = Óðinn] to the drink of the holy sacrifice.* (Marold 2017, 402)
So the Æsir took Baldr's body and carried it to the sea. Hringhorni was the name of Baldr's ship. It was the biggest of all ships. This the Æsir planned to launch and perform on it Baldr's funeral. But the ship refused to move. **So they sent to Giantland for a giantess called Hyrrokkin. And when she arrived, riding a wolf and using vipers as reins, she dismounted from her steed, and Odin summoned four berserks to look after the mount, and they were unable to hold it without knocking it down. Then Hyrrokkin went to the prow of the boat and pushed it out with the first touch so that flame flew from the rollers and all lands quaked.** Then Thor	Fullǫflug lét fjalla fram haf-Sleipni þramma Hildr, en Hropts of gildar hjalmeldum mar felldu. *Húsdrápa* 11 Den meget stærke jættekvinde stödte skibet ud, men Odins krigere kastede [hendes] hest til jorden. (Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, B I:130) *The exceedingly strong Hildr <valkyrie> of the mountains*

Gylfaginning	***Húsdrápa* 10–11**
became angry and grasped his hammer and was about to smash her head until all the gods begged for grace for her. Then Baldr's body was carried out on to the ship, and when his wife Nanna Nep's daughter saw this she collapsed with grief and died. She was carried on to the pyre and it was set fire to. Then Thor stood by and consecrated the pyre with Miollnir. … Baldr's horse was led on to the pyre with all its harness. (transl. Faulkes 1995, 49–50)	*[GIANTESS] made the sea-Sleipnir <horse> [SHIP] lumber forward, and the companions of Hroptr <= Óðinn> killed the steed with helmet-fires [SWORDS].* (Marold 2017, 402)

The Hyrrokkin mentioned here in Snorri's text has not received much scholarly attention and in the few instances she is mentioned by scholars, Snorri's narrative has been taken at face value. The only other instance of a person of that name is in Þorbjǫrn *dísarskáld*'s fragmented 'Poem about Þórr' where she is mentioned as one of many *jǫtunn*-women Þórr has slain. That must, however, have happened after Baldr's funeral, according to Snorri's text. Baldr's funeral is described in the latter half of Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* (7–11[1]), the only poetic source that mentions it and which is considered to be Snorri's main source for his narrative. Most of *Húsdrápa*'s description of the funeral is a relation of who is present, such as Freyr, seemingly with a group of warriors with him and Heimdallr. Óðinn also rides to his son's funeral. This is, however, not of importance for Snorri; he apparently includes everyone of the gods in his account: "Æsirnir tóku lík Baldrs ok fluttu til sævar," but does not make any special mention of valkyries or ravens, both of which are mentioned in *Húsdrápa*. The rest of the two narratives are even more at odds.

In *Húsdrápa* 10, the funerary action apparently is underway and we hear of something called "sylgr heilags tafns." According to both Finnur Jónsson (1912–15, B I:129) and Marold (2017, III:402), Óðinn, accompanied by valkyries and ravens, goes in the direction of this thing or entity. The prerequisite for this interpretation is that in the stanza, the preposition '**til**' (to) is implicit. I think this understanding may be a matter of contestation and I will here suggest an interpretation based on the stanza's exact wording.

Sylgr certainly means drink or blood (Fritzner 1867, s.v.; de Vries 1962, s.v.; Finnur Jónsson 1966, s.v.), whereas *tafn* is somewhat more open to question, explained as *bytte*, *føde* (Finnur Jónsson 1966, s.v.), *opfer*, *fang*, *nahrung* (de Vries 1962, s.v.), *blodigt*, *dyriskt offer* (Fritzner 1867, s.v.). It seems thus reasonable to interpret "sylgr heilags tafns" as 'drink'/'blood of a holy sacrifice.' Here it stands in genitive, which without the preposition 'til', can hardly indicate a spatial direction. It is, on the other hand, to be

[1] Due to a slight discrepancy in stanza numbering between the Skaldic Poetry and *Skjaldedigtningen* I have decided to keep to Marold's numbering for clarity; the discrepancy does not have any bearance upon my argument.

assumed that something belongs or is attached to it. The "Þar hykk" ('There I think') takes the accusative with an infinitive (Nygaard 1966, 231), which in this case must be the valkyries and the ravens. Thus we have here valkyries and ravens of the holy drink/blood of sacrifice. The aforementioned absence of the preposition (*til/að*, 'to'/'towards') thus precludes that the valkyries and/or ravens are following someone, (i.e. *sigrunni svinnum*), '**to**' something (holy drink/blood of sacrifice) as both Finnur and Marold suggest.

There is more. The verb *fylgja* can variously mean 'to follow,' 'accompany,' 'lead,' usually in the context of following someone somewhere. In Icelandic, the idiom 'fylgja einhverjum' (follow someone) with the spatial denotation excluded, has the meaning of following someone to his grave / being present at someone's funeral, and is found in written sources as early as the fourteenth century (ONP s.v.).

Finally, there is actually nothing that says that the "sigrunni svinnum" needs to be Óðinn.[2] That interpretation becomes even more unlikely with the above-introduced understanding that the valkyries and ravens link up to the holy drink/blood of sacrifice. Both valkyries and ravens are closely connected to Óðinn but in the situation described here, they are more likely to be going Óðinn's errands than actually following his person. The sacrifice in question may be much more likely connected to the funerary rites of the dead Baldr than his living papa.
I would thus suggest the following interpretation:

> **Þar hykk valkyrjur ok hrafna sylgs heilags tafns fylgja sigrunni svinnum**
> 'There I think valkyries and ravens of the holy drink/blood of sacrifice follow/accompany/lead the wise warrior [to the otherworld].'

As we see, there is no mention of a drink of any kind in *Gylfaginning*. In the eddic poems, on the other hand, some sort of a drink with holy or magical qualities, frequently appears in the hands of *jǫtunn*-women, notably at some formal, even ritualistic events (Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2024, ch. 3). Also, both *Grímnismál* (36) and *Eiríksmál* (1) note especially that *einherjar*, i.e. dead warriors, receive a drink from the hands of valkyries. Discussing the possible relations, connections, similarities etc. of valkyries and *jǫtunn*-women, would render this article far too long; let it suffice to say that these are not to be swept lightly aside.

Many of the eddic poems show a close connection between a powerful (even magical) drink and *jǫtunn*-women (Gunnlǫð, Gerðr, Hyndla – and others [Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2024, ch. 3]). Also, adding to this connection is substantial iconographic material (picture stones, miniature figurines) presenting a woman in an apparently time-honoured traditional costume, reaching forth a drink in a horn, whether to a [dead?] warrior, or at another occasion. The interpretation above of st. 10 in *Húsdrápa* may show a similarity to this. Numerous archaeological excavations also certify elaborate ceremonial funerary rites, whether at cremations or internments, including sacrificial activities of various

[2] Two other instances of these words occur in the poetic sources where one means just warriors (Gizurr *svarti, lausavísa*), the other refers to Hákon *jarl* (*Vellekla* 25).

kinds. I would thus suggest that the inherent meaning of the *Húsdrápa* lines may involve some kind of a libation performed by one or more women (valkyries? *jǫtunn*-women?) attending the funeral ceremony.

According to *Húsdrápa*, one more person is also present at Baldr's funeral, although we neither hear of her arrival nor are told her name in the poem; we have arrived at st. 11.

Nothing in the poem indicates that a *jǫtunn*-woman of the name Hyrrokkin has especially been sent for, as Snorri states. Rather it seems that the presence at the funeral of the "fullǫflug … fjalla … Hildr" ([Hildr: a valkyrie name] very strong … mountain … valkyrie = *jǫtunn*-woman; Fritzner 1867, s.v.; de Vries 1962, s.v.; Finnur Jónsson 1966, s.v.), is in no way out of the ordinary, since even though she is not specifically said to have arrived as part of the funeral procession itself, she is nonetheless mentioned as being present in full congruence with the other funeral-guests. But even if we assume that her name is Hyrrokkin, in *Húsdrápa* the description of her role seems to me to reveal a rather more profound procedure than Snorri's banalities describe.

Snorri tells us that the *jǫtunn*-woman, Hyrrokkin, comes riding on a wolf which then surprisingly changes into a "[hest sem] fjórir berserkir fengu eigi haldit nema þeir feldi hann" ('[a mount which four berserks were unable to hold] … without knocking it down'). This really sounds rather nonsensical, to say no more, and Snorri's narrative here really seems to be a very bungled-up interpretation of at least two things.

One is the idea of wolves being the steeds of *jǫtunn*-women, frequent in skaldic kennings and mentioned in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* (Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 266–67) as well as shown on the Hunnestad image-stone (Lindqvist 1941–42; Samnordisk runtextdatabas DR 284) (here, a flippant question comes to my mind: Is it possible that for some reason or other, a sacrificial beast might have been disguised as some other animal [for example, a wolf]? Masked and with pointed ears? Possibly so that it would not realise its imminent death? Investigating such an idea might become interesting, but that will have to be left for later).

Another is sacrificial activities at funerary ceremonies, known from innumerable grave excavations throughout the Old Norse world, in many cases elaborate, dramatic and most probably attended by a great many people (Price 2002; 2012, 13–46; 2014, 179–91; 2019). Snorri certainly states that Baldr's horse was "leiddr á bálit" ('led on to the pyre'), and it is not hard to imagine that one of the women of *Húsdrápa* 10 – possibly one named Hyrrokkin – (valkyrie? *jǫtunn*-woman? chief priestess?) rode or led Baldr's horse to the funeral; the horse then being sacrificed, possibly by Óðinn's warriors; ravens hovering overhead in anticipation of some sacrificial scraps.

Now, finally we come to the very special role of the woman in question, the "fullǫflug fjalla-Hildr" of *Húsdrápa* 11, the valkyrie/*jǫtunn*-woman/chief priestess (?), who very likely is the Hyrrokkin which Snorri says is the only person able to launch Baldr's funeral ship; and this in spite of all the gods, *einherjar*, *berserkir*, "margs konar þjóð" ('beings of many different kinds'), as well as "mikit fólk hrímþursa ok bergrisar" ('a great company of frost-giants and mountain giants') who are present at the funeral. Something seems to be amiss here.

Various sources, both textual and archaeological, seem to indicate that women may have played an important role at funerary (and possibly other) ceremonies: According to Neil Price – at least in some cases – "funeral performances … [proceeded] under the formal, almost professional, direction of female specialists" (2014, 179). It seems, we have a good reason to ask whether something of this kind may not be the real function of the "fullǫflug fjalla-Hildr" of *Húsdrápa* 11.

Certainly the verb *láta* ('to let') can – in special cases – mean to launch a ship, but its general meaning is much wider and variable according to context and circumstances, and the use of it most often involves making something (specified in each case) happen (Fritzner. 1867, s.v.; Cleasby, and Vigfússon. 1874/1957, s.v.; de Vries. 1962, s.v.; Ásgeir Bl. Magnússon 1989, s.v.) In the light of the aforesaid, it seems rather unlikely that the meaning of the first half of *Húsdrápa* 11 is that the woman – yes, let us call her Hyrrokkin – literally launches the funeral ship all by herself, without any help from all those other people present. A little earlier in the poem (st. 6) the word *fullǫflugr* is used about Þórr, there emphasising his mighty power and strength. A similar meaning, although figurative, seems to be the case here, and I would propose the understanding that this woman wields such great supernatural power, that she holds the office of some kind of a priestess who presides over the funeral ceremony. As mentioned, in the eddic poetry many *jǫtunn*-women seem to hold similar posts (Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2024, ch. 3).

It thus seems much more sensible to interpret the words "lét haf-Sleipni fram þramma" figuratively, with the meaning that the woman is sending the dead person in the funeral ship to the otherworld, possibly with a libation and/or a ritual involving a holy drink or sacrificial blood.

We can imagine her, standing in the forefront of a large group of other women and the multitude of spectators who have come to attend the spectacular funerary rites over which she presides in all her supernatural might and glory; a powerful medium between this world and the next. Let us not forget, that here the talk is not of funerary rites for any ordinary person; she is sending forth to the otherworld, not a man, but a god.[3]

Bibliography

Ásgeir Bl. Magnússon. 1989. *Íslensk orðsifjabók* [Icelandic etymological dictionary]. Orðabók háskólans.

Cleasby, Richard, and Guðbrandur Vigfússon. 1874/1957. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. Clarendon Press.

Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1988. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Viking Society for Northern Research.

———, ed. and transl. 1995. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda*. Everyman.

Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1912–15. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* B I [The Old Norse-Icelandic Skaldic poetry B I]. Rosenkilde og Bagger.

[3] My very best thanks to Neil Price, Þorleifur Hauksson and Mörður Árnason for reading and giving feedback and comments on this article.

———, ed. 1966. *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis*. Lynge og Søn.

Fritzner, Johan. 1867. *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog* [Dictionary of the Old Norse language]. Tryggve Juul Møller forlag.

Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar = Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds. 2014. *Eddukvæði* II. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenska fornritafélag.

Ingunn Ásdísardóttir. 2024. *Jötnar hundvísir: Norrænar goðsagnir í nýju ljósi.* [Very wise *jötnar:* Norse myths in a new light]. ReykjavíkurAkademían and Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag.

Lindqvist, Sune. 1941–42. *Gotlands Bildsteine I–II: gesammelt und untersucht von Gabriel Gustafson und Fredrik Nordin mit Zeichnungen von Olof Sörling; Photographien von Harald Faith-Ell.* Kungl. vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien.

Marold, Edith, ed. with the assistance of Vivian Busch, Jana Krüger, Ann-Dörte Kyas and Katharina Seidel, transl. from German by John Foulks. 2017. "Úlfr Uggason, *Húsdrápa*." In *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, edited by Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold, 402. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3. Brepols.

Nygaard, M. 1966. *Norrøn syntax* [Norse syntax]. Aschehoug.

ONP = *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*. https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php.

Price, Neil. 2012. "Mythic Acts: Material Narratives of the Dead in Viking Age Scandinavia." In *More than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions*, edited by Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt, 13–46. Nordic Academic Press.

———. 2014. "Nine Paces from Hel: Time and Motion in Old Norse Ritual Performance." *World Archaeology 46*, no. 2: 179–91.

———. 2019. *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. 2nd ed. Oxbow.

Samnordisk Runtextdatabas DR 284–86 https://www.uu.se/institution/nordiska/forskning/projekt/samnordisk-runtextdatabas.

de Vries, Jan. 1962. *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. E. J. Brill.

A DRAGON IS NO IDLE FANCY: LOKI'S SPAWN AND THOR'S BANE

Ármann Jakobsson*

Elusive Monster

In 1933, a beast sighted in the Scottish Loch Ness gained worldwide fame, compounded a year later when it was caught on camera by a London surgeon. That particular piece of evidence proved to be fraudulent but the monster in the loch keeps appearing in photographs and videos with fuzzy contours, *The Independent* reporting a sighting in September 2021. Uncertainty remains about the exact appearance of this aquatic other that seems to have scant narrative agency apart from hiding from humans and being spotted on occasion. Obviously the 'monster' could be an eel, a shark, a catfish, a tree, a seiche or even nothing at all outside the imagination of the spectator but in the folk narrative, it is an unidentified underwater object, an unexplained presence that possibly causes fear but mostly interest and scrutiny. For narrative purposes, its opacity is not a defect but rather an essential quality of its fascinatingly mysterious existence.

Existing in our perspicuous and orderly modern world, the unidentified creature of the Scottish Highlands is anomalous whereas in the medieval world mysterious beings were sighted far more frequently and less unexpectedly. Snorri Sturluson's mythological narratives include such a beast, as biologically undefined as the Loch Ness creature but defined in medieval language as an *ormr* ('worm' or 'dragon') and *gandr* ('staff'). I refer, of course, to the mighty Miðgarðsormr, also named Jǫrmungandr, the middle child of Loki and the giantess Angrboða ('Bringer of Terror') whom Óðinn promptly cast into the ocean at birth where the beast eventually grew into a horrifying behemoth that surrounds all continents and bites its own tail (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 34).[1] Apart from the

* University of Iceland.

[1] References in this article have been normalised and translated by the author. Since the main texts under consideration (*Snorra-Edda* and eddic poetry) exist in several excellent scholarly editions, my references are but an example.

Gylfaginning and *Skáldskaparmál* of Snorri, this creature makes an appearance in eddic and skaldic poems such as *Vǫluspá*, *Hymiskviða*, *Húsdrápa*, *Ragnarsdrápa* and *Þórsdrápa* but usually its contours are hazy. It is a worm or snake, a reptile, marine mammal or possibly fish, a monstrous being that somehow functions not only as a formidable antagonist of the strongest of gods but also as the bonds or fetters or ties of the cosmos whose eventual dislocation may signify the apocalypse.

Appearing only twice before the apocalyptic showdown between gods and giants, this great phallic symbol, the Irmingand, is noteworthy mainly as beckoning the death of the mighty Þórr whom he eventually kills according to *Gylfaginning* (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 72). Þórr presumably seeks the mighty sea beast in order to elude the bleak fate of their last confrontation but this Irmingand cannot really be budged nor can it be hunted or simply fished like a common carp. But what sort of sea beast is this bane of Þórr? When discussing Old Norse dragons in 1936, J.R.R. Tolkien tried to dismiss the "vast and vague Encircler of the World" as "the doom of the great gods and no matter for heroes" (1997, 12), implying that this colossal apocalyptical creature casts little light on the rest of the unreal dragon fauna. This was wise but unsatisfying. There are indeed differences between Miðgarðsormr and all his draconic brethren but these may be illuminating and thus advantageous to thinking about dragons and the singularity of the vast ocean terror.

Conversational Skills

As scholars have noted, the legendary heroic youngster Sigurðr not only slays the dragon Fáfnir on Gnitaheiðr but then calmly goes on to interrogate and be interrogated by his adversary (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014). This our hero is able to do since Fáfnir turns out to be a most eloquent beast who not only possesses useful prophetic knowledge, and possibly also less elegant street smarts that heroic youngsters may be in want of, but also the ability to reflect on his own life and past actions and to convey his thoughts to the inexperienced adolescent. Even the heart of the brute seems to have language-bestowing abilities, as is evidenced when Sigurðr tastes its blood and can suddenly understand the birds twittering in the wood, fortuitously since these playful little things possess and disseminate knowledge that turns out to be vital to him.

While the linguistic abilities inherent in the blood of his heart are somewhat opaque in their origins, Fáfnir's other linguistic gifts are possibly explained by the fact that this ogre was according to the preserved version of the legend in *Snorra-Edda* and *Völsunga saga* originally a humanoid, hovering like his brother Reginn on the thin line between dwarf and human. Even metamorphosing into wormshape (*orms líki*) is possibly mainly a change in outward appearance and does not totally eclipse Fáfnir's original upbringing in a semi-civilised society that includes the ability to speak to humans. Whatever the reason, Sigurðr's only conversation with Fáfnir does not turn out to be much of a confrontation with the wild and untamed but rather like a young apprentice seeking wisdom from an old and wise father figure who takes the opportunity to warn the

juvenile warrior not to trust his treacherous mentor Reginn, Fáfnir's own brother and nemesis whose evil intentions are probably uniquely translucent to his own sibling.

Approaching Old Norse myths and legends from the *Beowulf* standpoint, Tolkien was more interested in Fáfnir and in talking dragons in general, presumably because they were not silent and inscrutable brutes. Like medieval authors but unlike his modern adaptors, this scholar and novelist was more interested in councils and entmoots than running and shouting and fighting (Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 28–29). However, the Middle-earth serpent is ill-fitting into a category of terrifyingly intelligent or even intellectual talking dragons. Rather than a metamorphosed anthropoid, it seems on the contrary to be born as a snake and its primary talent to be for gargantuan growth. As a nonverbal adversary, this serpent would perhaps have more in common with the flying dark necrophiliac nadder called Níðhǫggr, or possibly 'malicious stabber,' than talking dragons like the wealthy Fáfnir. Snorri Sturluson defines all three, Fáfnir, Níðhǫggr and Jǫrmungandr, as *ormar* in his *Skáldskaparmál* and adds Góinn, Móinn, Grafvitnir, Ófnir, Svafnir and Grábakr, little-known serpents that may or may not have human qualities such as speech and intelligence (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 171).

In stark contrast to Fáfnir, the Miðgarðsormr has no lines to speak or words to impart in Eddic myths or other medieval narratives. Thus it is unclear whether it should be regarded as totally bestial or a sentient being, dangerous because of its innate hostility rather than accidentally harmful due to its immense proportions and bestial instincts. It is also unclear how deliberately and for what reasons this fiend opposes Þórr in particular at the end of days. Did Þórr pick the serpent as his nemesis as the greatest possible challenge to his might or did they choose each other as the most formidable foe? Why is Þórr the dragonslayer amongst the Old Norse gods and why is the Miðgarðsormr the only antagonist formidable enough to pose a threat to the bravest and strongest of gods? There are few clues in the extant myths to illuminate such questions.

Heroic Son

The looming final duel between Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr colours the fiend's every appearance in the Eddic myths. Thus the gigantic serpent has a cameo in the tale of Þórr's visit to Útgarðr where he appears in the guise of a harmless house cat that the god is challenged to lift, only to find the burden somewhat heavier than expected (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 57–58). What originally seemed like a massive humiliation for the hero later turns out to have been a clever illusion, and Þórr's actual performance had the giants shivering in fear. Loki is present in this narrative, possibly in two roles, but shows no affinity with his monstrous offspring, their only relationship apart from kinship being their alliance in the final battle of the gods.

Another such foreshadowing narrative is the 'fishing expedition' where Þórr tries to catch the great serpent like a fish, using a bigger hook and more impressive bait but essentially following the principles of fishing. In *Snorra Edda* and the poem *Hymiskviða*, the son of the earth is accompanied in this by the giant Hymir which in the former narrative is presented as revenge for Þórr's former humiliation at Útgarðr. Þórr and the

titanic worm encounter each other as Þórr is trying to draw his big fish in but when Þórr has faced the malignantly ugly visage of his adversary and is about to strike the serpent with his somewhat abridged hammer, Hymir sabotages the attempt and thus Þórr fails to kill his eventual assailant (see e.g. Finnur Jónsson 1931, 61–63; Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 399–407).

As evidenced by this hunting tale, the actual size of the serpent is quite vague since it can both encircle all the lands and yet it is still deemed realistic by an ambitious deity to haul this worm into a small boat. Of course, mythical narratives can be full of mysteries, enigmas and possible inconsistencies and ambiguities. The most important feature might possibly be that Þórr's concern with the serpent seems to be lifelong, his looming death in the shape of this monstrous entity is not just the end but a constant companion throughout his life, a looming fiendish presence abhorrent to the heroic god who wishes to best it before it is too late. The pragmatic aspect of Þórr's hunt for his enemy is possibly of lesser consequence than his heroic endeavour to face it in all its glory rather than attempting to avoid his fate. In this, possibly Þórr represents man as a transcendent entity whose yearning for control over his own fate is boundless. That the attempt is a failure may be of less significance than the fact that it was made.

It is a peculiar aspect of *Snorra Edda* that the gods appear as protagonists rather than paranormal entities that are beyond the understanding of humans. In the sagas that take place in the human world, the gods do function in their proper role as mysterious beings with superhuman powers but in *Snorra Edda*, they are presented rather as fallible protagonists who may get tricked and thwarted and disappointed in spite of all their powers. Thus the audience is invited to put itself into their shoes, contrary to e.g. Christians who are rarely invited to share their god's point of view. This may be because *Snorra Edda* is composed after the gods have essentially been deposed as such with the adoption of a new hegemonic religion. As a former deity, Þórr has the potential to become a mythical counterpart to the impatient youthful legendary hero unappeasably on the lookout for new rites of passage and more monsters to conquer.

Whatever the reason, the wormhunting Þórr becomes a powerful representation of humanity facing its own mortality in the guise of a gigantic impregnable serpent whom it nevertheless cannot stop attempting to vanquish. In the narrative, the Miðgarðsormr does not need to say anything; its function is being massive, unyielding and unconquerable, a 'fish' too big to hunt even though the monomaniacal hero-god refuses to let it be.

Typhonian Janus

As indicated, the paternity of Miðgarðsormr does not figure heavily in those narratives where this demonic ophidian shows its frightening countenance. When Loki is introduced in the *Snorra Edda* however, his role as the father of all the most dreadful and apocalyptic harbingers of doom is palpably his most significant aspect. Apart from his more respectable wife in the world of the Æsir, Loki has a gigantic mistress called Angrboða about which little is known except for her full name, which encapsulates the

doom that her three children bring and the gods immediately fear (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 34). Their various shapes as a wolf, snake and monstrous human evoke many counterparts in a mythology replete with frightening wolves, lethal reptiles and monstrous anthropoids. The gods' futile attempts to harness this danger or drive it further away are the main theme of the narrative of each terror. Hel gets her own distant kingdom, the serpent is thrown into the ocean and the wolf eventually enfettered. All these measures are, however, temporary. The three fears will ultimately become unleashed and lethal to even the most powerful gods.

Loki's own name, possibly connected to the end (*lok*) of all things, is glaringly fitting for the main instigator of those evil events that bring about the death of the gods and maybe his place amongst them is equally appropriate, similar perhaps to the coffin that the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt is said to have slept in long before her death. Your end may seem more manageable if you keep it close to you and thus Loki, the main instrument of the gods' eventual demise, must be kept safe amongst them and even invited to accompany Óðinn and Þórr on their many journeys. This is one possible motive for the somewhat puzzling practice of the mightiest paranormal powers to keep such a scumbag in their vicinity but possibly their powers of reasoning are in the end governed by a fear of the enigmatic. As a danger, Loki is better seen than unseen, familiarity breeds contempt and possibly these fallible pagan powers entertain a futile fantasy that he, and thus their eventual destruction, can somehow be controlled by being kept close.

Loki's duplicity is both threatening and useful and in a way, it echoes the multiplicity of Óðinn himself, the god of many guises. Like Loki, he has giant ancestry although unlike him, he does not spawn monsters waiting to devour everything brilliant and benign at the end of the world. Óðinn also seems a bit impotent when facing the terrible heritage of Loki and nowhere is that as obvious as in his treatment of Miðgarðsormr. Like an ineffective twentieth-century government, he simply throws the wasteful creature into the ocean, postponing the trouble and leaving the ogre to later emerge from the deep to cause its appointed havoc. But what else can be done with a figure of destruction other than to try to keep it at bay for a while?

This is the End

In the *Vǫluspá* [Sybil's Prophecy], the horrid worm plays its part, in verse 47 and 43, depending on the version of the poem: "snýsk Jǫrmungandr í jötunmóði" (Dronke 1997, 20) ('the Ermengand turns in its gigantic mood'). This is further corroborated by the prose version of Snorri Sturluson: "Miðgarðsormr blæs svá eitrinu at hann dreifir lopt öll ok lǫg, ok er hann allógurligr, ok er hann á aðra hlið úlfinum" ('The Middle-earth serpent so spews his poison that it spreads over all heavens and seas and he is fairly scare side by side with the wolf') (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 71); this is only the first of two appearances of the great serpent in the twilight of the gods narrative since Þórr later confronts and bests his enormity in the field of Vígríðr: "Þórr ber banaorð af Miðgarðsormi ok stígr þaðan braut níu fet. Þá fellr hann dauðr til jarðar fyrir eitri því er

ormrinn blæss á hann" ('Thor kills the Middle-earth serpent and walks nine feet away from him. Then he falls dead killed by the poison the serpent spewed at him') (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 72). Not even the heroic god can survive the poison of the massive worm – there is no mention of dragonfire here or in general in Old Norse dragon narratives – and even though he manages to vanquish his killer, Þórr cannot survive the encounter.

The dreadful truth of the spawn of Loki is that each and every one of them, and certainly when all are taken as one, represents an enemy that is unbeatable. In this, they also symbolise the finiteness of existence, the dark side of the relentless march of time that makes our existence bearable but also threatens us with a final dark nothingness, an incomprehensible and loathsome finality that must be resisted since in only that resistance lies our erotic and life-affirming agency. The beast may be colossal but still no bigger than this inevitable and yet almost incomprehensible truth.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Dronke, Ursula, ed. 1997. *The Poetic Edda, Volume II: Mythological Poems.* Clarendon Press.

Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1931. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*. Gyldendalske Boghandel – Nordisk Forlag.

Gade, Kari Ellen and Edith Marold, ed. 2017. *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages III. 2 vols. Brepols.

Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds. 2014. *Eddukvæði*. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Further Reading

Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir. 2012. "The Origin and Development of the *fornaldarsögur* as Illustrated by *Völsunga saga*." In *The Legendary Sagas Origins and Development*, edited by Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, 59–82. University of Iceland Press.

Acker, Paul. 2013. "Dragons in the Eddas and in Early Nordic Art." In *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend*, edited by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington, 53–57. Routledge Medieval Casebooks. Routledge.

Ármann Jakobsson. 2009. "Talk to the Dragon: Tolkien as Translator." *Tolkien Studies* 6: 27–39.

Kopár, Lilla. 2004. "The Iconography of Viking-Age Stone Sculptures: Visual Evidence of Religious Accommodation in the Anglo-Scandinavian Communities of Northern England." PhD diss. University of Szeged.

Larrington, Carolyne. 2006. "Loki's Children." In *The Fantastic in Old Norse Icelandic Literature, Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, Durham and York 6th–12th August 2006*, edited by John McKinnell et al., 541–50. Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.

Martin, David S. and Alastair Boyd. 1999. *Nessie – The Surgeon's Photograph Exposed*. Martin and Boyd.

McKinnell, John. 1994. *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*. Il Calamo.

———, 2015. "The Sigmundr / Sigurðr Story in an Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norse Context." In *Medieval Nordic Literature in its European Context*, edited by Else Mundal, 50–77. Dreyers Forlag.

Mikučionis, Ugnius. 2017. "Recognizing a *dvergr:* Physical Status and External Appearance of *dvergar* in Medieval Nordic Sources (8th–13th century)." *Roda da Fortuna: Electronic Journal About Antiquity and Middle Ages* 6, no. 1: 55–98.

Motz, Lotte. 1982. "Giants in Folklore and Mythology: A New Approach." *Folklore* 93: 70–84.

Ney, Agneta. 2012. "*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* och Sigurdstraditionen" [Snorri Sturluson's Edda and the Sigurd tradition]. In *The Legendary Sagas Origins and Development*, edited by Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, 83–102. University of Iceland Press.

Shilton, Howard. 1997. "The Nature of Beowulf's Dragon." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 79, no. 3: 67–78.

Symons, Victoria. 2015. "*Wreoþenhilt ond wyrmfah:* Confronting Serpents in *Beowulf* and Beyond." In *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia*, edited by Michael D. J. Bintley and Thomas J. T. Williams, 73–93. Anglo-Saxon Studies 29. Boydell & Brewer.

Tally, Joyce Ann. 1983. "The Dragon's Progress: The Significance of the Dragon in *Beowulf*, the *Volsunga Saga*, *Das Nibelungenlied*, and *Der Ring des Nibelungen*." PhD Diss. University of Denver. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing 12.

Tolkien, J. R. R. 1997. *The Monsters and The Critics, and Other Essays*, edited by Christopher Tolkien. Harper Collins Publishers.

Unerman, Sandra. 2002. "Dragons in Twentieth-Century Fiction." *Folklore* 113: 94–101.

VALHÖLL Í ÍSLENSKU LANDSLAGI

Svavar Sigmundsson*

Nokkur staðanöfn í Snorra-Eddu er að finna meðal íslenskra örnefna og er Valhöll þeirra algengast. Í þessari grein verður þetta örnefni skoðað og reynt að skyggnast eftir hvaða hugmyndir liggja að baki því.

Ég ólst upp á bæ á Suðurlandi, Laugum í Flóa, þar sem örnefnið Valhöll var nafn á litlum grjóthól í fjárhústúni þar sem við systkinin áttum bú að barna sið. Í örnefnalýsingu segir: „Þar var sagt að hefði verið bær til forna og hefði þar sést fyrir brunni og tóftum“ (Jón M. Ívarsson 2020, 858).

Mynd 1. Valhöll. Hluti myndar á forsíðu Snorra-Eddu í ÍB 299 4to.
Ljósmynd: Landsbókasafn Íslands.

* Fyrrv. forstöðumaður Örnefnastofnunar, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum.

Valhöll hefur verið nafn á ýmsum byggingum á Íslandi, búð Snorra Sturlusonar á Þingvöllum, hóteli á sama stað frá 1898 en einnig bæ eða húsi í Grindavík og aðsetri stjórnmálaflokks í Reykjavík. Þá er þess einnig að geta að Valhöll hét hús kvenskáta frá Akureyri á Veigastöðum í S-Þing. þar sem hét áður Símonarkot. Verbúð byggð úr timbri á tveimur hæðum á Látrum í S-Þing. hét Valhöll og lendingin við hana Valhallarlending (Björn Hróarsson 1992, 97; Valgarður Egilsson 2000, 146–47). Theódór Friðriksson rithöfundur lét sögu sína Útlagar gerast þar: „En þar hafði verið bygð upp ný verbúð dálítið utan við bæinn, sem vakti mikið umtal, og höfðu engir séð neina verbúð eins stóra og fallega við allan Laugafjörð“ (Theódór Friðriksson 1922, 14). Hér voru aðeins nefnd nokkur dæmi um notkun nafnsins sem nafns á húsum.

Síðan verður athygli beint að Valhöll eins og nafnið kemur fram í örnefnum vítt og breitt um landið en þau eru a.m.k. 28 talsins, þegar bæði eru talin nöfn í náttúrunni (25) og nöfn á húsum eða húsaleifum (3), skv. Nafnið.is. Þau verða nú rakin að mestu eftir örnefnalýsingum í Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, á vefnum Nafnið.is.

Valhöll sem örnefni:

1) Litla-Hraun, Hnapp. Þar er Valhöll nafn á steini.
2) Vigur, N-Ís. Slétt flöt milli Bæjarhryggs og Vörðukletta.
3) Búastaðir í Vopnafirði, N-Múl. Þar er skráð örnefnið Valhóll og Valhólsflói en jafnframt er þar Valhallarhús sem var fjárhús og Valhallarteigur sem var tún.
4) Hólmar í Reyðarfirði, S-Múl. Klettabelti milli Hrauns og Flateyrar. Draugurinn Hólmaskotta átti heima þar (Hjörleifur Guttormsson 2005, 33).
5) Lunansholt, Rang. Hæð suður af Lamphól, norðaustur af túninu.
6) Skógsnes, Árn. Lítill hóll sem einnig var nefndur Valhóll.
7) Holt, Árn. Grýttur hóll nærri mörkum móti Hæringsstöðum.
   „Í Valhöll voru þeir föllnu grafnir sem féllu við Orustuhóla.“
8) Gaulverjabær, Árn. Norður frá Nónhól.
9) Laugar, Árn. Grjóthóll í Fjárhústúni. Þar átti að hafa verið bær. Þar voru fjárhús nærri.

Valhöll sem hús eða húsaleifar:

10) Þingeyrar, A-Hún. Gömul og hrörleg fjárhús suðvestur frá bænum. Þau „höfðu frá fornu fari borið nafnið Valhöll … þótt ekki væru þau reisuleg.“
11) Langamýri, Skag. Gamalt grænt tóftarbrot. Mun þar hafa verið í fyrndinni lítið kotbýli eða húsmannskofar. Hjalti Pálsson frá Hofi (2001, 349) segir að Valhallar sjái nú engan stað lengur.
12) Hofstaðir og Hofstaðasel, Skag. Tóftarbrot á fremur lágum hól. Munnmæli voru um að hið forna hof hafi staðið þar. Sunnan við Valhöll voru fjárhús. Í Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns segir að það sé gerði með girðingum, „ei minnast menn að hjer hafi bygt verið“ (1930, 201). Þetta er eina dæmið um Valhöll í jarðabók Árna og Páls. Sveinn Pálsson (1983, 645) nefnir í Ferðabók sinni eyðibýlið Vallhól, hjáleigu frá Hofstöðum. Sigurður Vigfússon ferðaðist þar um 1886 og talar um dálitla hæð sem nefnd er Valhöll. „Nafn hólsins Valhöll

er og forneskjulegt og einkennilegt, og bendir til, að þar hafi áður blót verið í heiðni“ (1892, 90). Hjalti Pálsson frá Hofi segir að búið sé að jafna út tóftir fjárhúsa og sjái nánast ekki fyrir þeim lengur (2010, 241; mynd á bls. 240, Hoftóftin Valhöll).

13) Róðhóll, Skag. Björn Schram byggði bæjarhús úr timbri á Róðhóli upp úr aldamótum 1900 sem stóð fram til 1935. Það var ein baðstofa og eldhús í endanum en fjós var vestan við. Bærinn var að síðustu nefndur Valhöll og að lokum gerður að hesthúsi (Hjalti Pálsson frá Hofi 2017, 75; mynd á sömu bls.).
14) Kraunastaðir, S-Þing. Þar er nefnd tóft sem hét Helvíti, sennilega gamalt hesthús. Nokkru ofar var fjárhúsið Valhöll. Fjárhúsið Paradís var kofi neðan undir túngarði.
15) Miðhvammur, S-Þing. Valhöll nefndu krakkarnir fjárhús nyrst á túninu.
16) Stórulaugar, S-Þing. „Suður af Víti var garðlag, næstum því ferhyrnt; það hét Valhöll.“ Það var talið annaðhvort fjárrétt eða heygarður. Nú hefur það verið sléttað og er talið tún hjá Landmælingum Íslands.
17) Hof, S-Múl. Valhöll var nafn á tóftum í túninu skammt frá Ásgarði. Þar hafði verið hesthús, síðan hlaða en síðar sléttað.
18) Þvottá, S-Múl. Valhöll var hesthús sem síðar var lagt niður.

Þannig er um helmingur Valhallar-nafnanna örnefni og um helmingur mannvistarnöfn.

Mynd 2. Valhöll á Róðhóli í Skagafirði. Upphaflega íbúðarhús, síðar notað sem hesthús. Ljósmynd: Héraðsskjalasafn Skagfirðinga.

Mynd 3. Valhöll á Laugum í Flóa. Ljósmynd: Svavar Sigmundsson.

Valhallarnafnið kemur auk þess fyrir í örnefnasjá Landmælinga Íslands á svonefndri Innri-Ey á Breiðafirði (Heimild nr. L 1020015 Brokey-Fagurey). Örnefnið er ekki í örnefnaskrá og ekki skráð hvað örnefnið á við.

Skv. Snorra-Eddu var Valhöll bústaður Óðins og Einherja, en þangað fóru þeir menn sem féllu fyrir vopnum. Forliður nafnsins hefur m.a. verið talinn vera valur „vopndauðir menn."

Þannig er sagt frá iðju einherja í Snorra-Eddu:

> Allir einherjar
> Óðins túnum í
> höggvast hvern dag.
> Val þeir kjósa
> og ríða vígi frá
> sitja meirr um sáttir saman.
> (Uppsala-Edda 2013, 184)

Skv. Ásgeiri Bl. Magnússyni (1989) virðist orðið ekki koma fyrir í öðrum germönskum málum nema sem tökuorð úr norrænu. Hann telur jafnframt að hugmyndin um sérstakan stað fyrir vopndauða menn sé ung. Norski fræðimaðurinn Magnus Olsen benti á að lýsing Valhallar minnti á Colosseum í Róm og að forliðurinn val- vísaði til velskrar eða rómverskrar hallar (1963, 124–47).

Lýsingin á Valhöll í Snorra-Eddu bendir til slíkrar hallar þegar Hár kveður:

> Fimm hundruð dyra
> og fjóra tugu
> svo hygg eg á Valhöllu vera.
> (Uppsala-Edda 2013, 184; tilvitnunin er úr Grímnismálum 24)

Það skal tekið fram að hér er átt við stór hundruð sem gerir að dyrnar verða 640 talsins!

Myndir af Valhöll eru nokkrar til í handritum, m.a. í AM 738 4to (um 1680) (sbr. Jónas Kristjánsson 1993, 31). Málverk af Valhöll eftir Hjalta Þorsteinsson í Vatnsfirði var til, en er ekki varðveitt (sbr. Þorvaldur Thoroddsen 2004, 196). Mynd af Valhöll er einnig í ÍB 299 4to (1764), (sbr. Þórgunnur Snædal 2023, 126).

Í Eddukvæðinu Atlakviðu er nefnd Valhöll og líklega átt við velska (ítalska) höll eða konungshöll almennt:

> Drukku þar dróttmegir,
> en dyljendr þögðu,
> vín í valhöllu (2).
> (*Eddukvæði* II, 372)

Ekki hefur verið eins kátt í þeim íslensku Valhöllum sem hér voru nefndar að framan. Ólafur Briem fjallaði um Valhöll í bók sinni Heiðinn siður á Íslandi. Hann segir þar eftirfarandi: „Fyrst hinir föllnu hermenn fóru til Óðins eftir dauðann, lá næst að hugsa sér, að þeir hafi lifað einhvers konar hirðlífi með honum á líkan hátt og þeir lifðu áður með mennskum konungum. Með þessari hugmynd er grundvöllurinn lagður að Valhöll“ (1945, 114).

Jónas Jónasson frá Hrafnagili fjallar um lýsingar á öðru lífi í bók sinni um íslenska þjóðhætti og orðar það svo: „Þannig hafa lýsingar vorar á öðru lífi fengið á sig talsverðan blæ af Eddutrúnni, og þarf þar ekki annað en bera saman lýsingu lífsins í Valhöll innivið og lýsingu séra Sigurðar á Presthólum“ (1834, 388). Jónas vísar til Hugvekjusálma séra Sigurðar, en í útgáfunni frá 1834 má lesa eftirfarandi í 48. sálmi, sem er um „það allra ástúðlegasta samlag, sem vér skulum hafa við heilaga engla, í eilífu lífi“. Fyrri hluti 4. vers hljóðar þannig:

> Útvöldum Guðs svo gleðjist geð,
> gestaboð er tilreitt.
> Klára vín, feiti, mergur með,
> mun þar til rétta veitt.
> Svoddan veislu vér sitjum að,
> sælir um eilíf ár,
> og lof syngjandi þökkum það,
> þá verður gleðin klár.
> (Sigurður Jónsson á Presthólum 1834, 72).

Jónas segir ennfremur að menn hafi í heiðni átt samastað í Valhöll eða á Náströnd en sumir hafi dáið í fjöll eða björg (1934, 419). Nokkur fjöll eða klettar í Suður-Svíþjóð bera nafnið Valhall og segir þjóðtrúin að þau hafi verið bústaðir dauðra (Turville-Petre 1964, 55; Simek 1993, 248). Svenskt ortnamnslexikon getur þeirra þó að engu (SOL 2016).

Ólafur Briem segir í bók sinni, að það hafi verið nauðsyn í ásatrúnni að Óðinn ætti sér einhverja höll þar sem hann tæki á móti vopndauðum mönnum en rómversku

áhrifin gætu ekki verið fyrsta orsök þess að Valhöll var byggð heldur lægju þau í lýsingum á stærð hennar og þeim skemmtunum sem þar fóru fram, bardögum skylmingamanna og fleira (1945, 115).

E. F. Halvorsen fjallar um Valhöll í KLNM og segir þar m.a.: „Det er neppe grunn til å forkaste den tradisjonelle tydning av navnet V. : Første ledd er *valr* m. „de falne", andre ledd er hǫll „hus som folk bor i" (1975, 463).

Í íslenskum þjóðsögum er Valhöll aðeins nefnd hjá Jóni Árnasyni sem dvalarstaður dauðra manna. Í kaflanum um fyrirburði, illsvita og varúðir hjá Jóni Árnasyni er þessi klausa: „Allt það sem menn óska sér og fá ekki fær kerlingin í Valhöll nema sagt sé um leið og maður óskar:

> „Vatn og salt í Valhöll,
> en óskin öll til mín"
> (1954, 531)

Ekki er vitað hvort einhver sögn liggur að baki sögunni af kerlingunni í Valhöll. En í Snorra-Eddu segir Gangleri: „Hvað hafa einherjar að drykk er þeim endist jamgnógliga sem vistin, eða er þar vatn drukkið? Hár segir: Undarliga spyrðu, að Alföður mundi bjóða til sín konungum eða jörlum og mundi hann gefa þeim vatn að drekka" (Uppsala-Edda 2013, 183).

Í Gautreks sögu segir Snotra frá Ætternisstapa með þessum orðum: „ok deyja þar allir várir foreldrar fyrir utan alla sótt ok fara þá til Óðins, ok þurfum vér af engu váru forellri þyngsl at hafa né þrjózku, því at þessi sældarstaðr hefir öllum verit jafnfrjáls várum ættmönnum" (FSN 1950, 5).

Hugmyndin um sældarstað kemur ekki sérstaklega fram í örnefnalýsingunum en hugsanlega hefur verið litið á Valhallir sem leiksvæði barna eins og í mínu eigin tilviki. Hugmyndin um einherja og sífellda bardaga hefur þá líklega verið víðs fjarri.

Örnefnið Paradís er algengt á Íslandi (hátt í 100 dæmi, skv. Nafnið.is) og má e.t.v. skipa því í flokk með Valhöll sem sælustað. Þar á meðal eru leiksvæði barna. Sérstaklega er nefnd Paradís á Skarfsstöðum í Dölum þar sem hvammur í klettabelti, leikvöllur barna, heitir Valhöll og brekka í Ófeigsfirði, þar sem börn léku sér á skíðum, ber einnig nafnið Paradís (Sbr. Lethbridge 2020, 17–19).

Aðeins í einu dæmi fylgdi sú saga Valhöll í örnefnalýsingunum að þangað færu þeir sem féllu í bardaga, þ.e. í Holti í Stokkseyrarhreppi í Árn., sbr. hér að framan. Í Konungsannál er nefnt Laugavíg í Flóa árið 1171 en ekki er varðveitt nein sögn um að Valhöll á Laugum sé tengd mannvígum (Annálar 1953, 21).

Örnefnið Valhóll var hér nefnt sem annað nafn á Valhöll á Búastöðum í Vopnafirði. Auk þess eru tilgreindir 3 Valhólar meðal örnefna í örnefnalýsingum:

1) Barkarstaðir, V-Hún. Valhóll og Litli-Valhóll eru skráðir þar.
2) Holt á Ásum, A-Hún. Valhóll er þar án skýringa.
3) Saurbær í Kolbeinsdal, Skag. Valhóll er kollóttur grasivaxinn hóll í merkjum og hefur verið gömul reiðgata um hann. Í örnefnalýsingu segir að hóllinn dragi sennilega nafn af fálka sem jöfnum höndum sé nefndur valur.

Það skal nefnt að ritháttur nafnsins Valhöll hefur á vissu skeiði í skriftarsögunni verið lesið Valhóll.

Sérstakt er hvað Valhallar-nöfnin eiga oft við fjárhús eða hesthús eða tóftir húsa. Þá vaknar spurningin hvort nöfnin séu gefin hvers kyns fénaðarhúsum sem standa stök en ekki t.d. fjós sem oft voru sambyggð bæjarhúsum. Hugmyndin um höll með margar dyr eins og fornar heimildir herma um Paradís Óðins getur ekki hafa verið lifandi fyrir þeim sem gáfu Valhallar-örnefnin. Hesthús höfðu venjulega aðeins einar dyr, fjárhús stundum tvennar en tæplega fleiri.

Dæmi er um það að litið hafi verið á Valhöll sem dvalarstað eftir dauðann á síðari öldum. Hallgerður Gísladóttir skrifar í bók sinni Íslensk matarhefð, að strokkar sem illa gengu hafi stundum verið nefndir Valhallarstrokkar. „Var piparjómfrúm strítt á því að þegar þær kæmu til Valhallar yrðu þær látnar skaka strokk sem aldrei strokkaðist í.“ (Svar við Spurningaskrá Þjóðminjasafns ÞÞ362; Hallgerður Gísladóttir 2023, 65).

Valhallirnar hér á landi virðast þó yfirleitt ekki hafa verið álitnar slíkir dvalarstaðir manna eftir dauðann.

Helstu niðurstöður af þessum athugunum á vitnisburði örnefna og fleiri heimilda um Valhöll í íslensku landslagi eru að nafnið hefur verið gefið „virðulegum“ byggingum bæði í fyrri tíð, þ.e. búð á Þingvöllum, og á síðari tímum, hóteli á sama stað. Sem örnefni getur Valhöll aðallega verið af tvennu tagi, annars vegar leifar af byggingu eða hins vegar hóll, steinn eða klettar eða álíka náttúrufyrirbæri.

Nafnið hefur einnig verið gefið sem e.k. háðungarnafn á fénaðarhúsum eða lélegum mannabústað. Aðeins í einu tilviki fylgdi örnefninu skýring að þangað færu vopndauðir menn eins og í Valhöll Óðins.

Ekki er hægt að sjá af örnefnunum og skýringum við þau að Valhöll hafi fengið það hlutskipti að vera bústaður Óðins hins illa eða fjandans eins og hann varð í íslenskri þjóðtrú eftir að kristni komst á. Ef Valhöll varð „verri staðurinn“ er ekki líklegt að hún hefði orðið leikstaður barna. Aðeins á einum stað er þess getið að handanheimavera búi þar, þ.e. Hólmaskotta í Reyðarfirði.

En hvað þeim bjó í hug sem gáfu nafnið Valhöll í íslensku landslagi getum við að svo stöddu ekki vitað neitt með vissu.

Heimildir

Frumheimildir

Annálar = Guðni Jónsson, útg. 1953. *Annálar og nafnaskrá*. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, Haukadalsútgáfan.

Árni Magnússon og Páll Vídalín. 1930. *Jarðabók Árna Magnússonar og Páls Vídalíns*. Níunda bindi. Hið íslenska fræðafjelag í Kaupmannahöfn.

Eddukvæði I–II. 2014. Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason útg. Hið íslenska fornritafélag.

FSN = Guðni Jónsson, útg. 1950. *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* IV. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.

Jón Árnason. 1954. *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri* II. Ný útgáfa. Árni Böðvarsson og Bjarni Vilhjálmsson önnuðust útgáfuna. Bókaútgáfan Þjóðsaga.

Nafnið.is.

SOL = *Svenskt ortnamnslexikon*. Andra reviderade upplagan, ritstj. Mats Wahlberg. Institutet för språk och folkminnen Uppsala.

Örnefnasjá. Landmælingar Íslands. lmi.is.

Uppsala-Edda = Heimir Pálsson, útg. 2013. Snorri Sturluson. *Uppsala-Edda: Uppsalahandritið DG 11 4to.* Bókaútgáfan Opna, Snorrastofa í Reykholti.

Eftirheimildir

Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon. 1989. *Íslensk orðsifjabók* [Icelandic etymological dictionary]. Orðabók Háskólans.

Björn Hróarsson. 1992. *Norðan byggða milli Eyjafjarðar og Skjálfanda* [North of the settlements between Eyjafjörður and Skjálfandi]. Árbók 1992. Ferðafélag Íslands.

Hallgerður Gísladóttir. 2023. *Íslensk matarhefð* [Icelandic food tradition]. 2. útg. Þjóðminjasafn Íslands og Sæmundur.

Halvorsen, Eyvind F. 1975. „Valhall.“ Í *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* [Cultural-historical dictionary of the Nordic Middle Ages]. 19. bindi. Bókaverzlun Ísafoldar.

Hjalti Pálsson frá Hofi. 2001. *Byggðasaga Skagafjarðar* [The history of the Skagafjörður region] II: Staðarhreppur – Seyluhreppur. Sögufélag Skagfirðinga.

———. 2010. *Byggðasaga Skagafjarðar* V: Rípurhreppur – Viðvíkurhreppur. Sögufélag Skagfirðinga.

———. 2017. *Byggðasaga Skagafjarðar* VIII: Fellshreppur – Haganeshreppur. Sögufélag Skagfirðinga.

Hjörleifur Guttormsson. 2005. *Austfirðir frá Reyðarfirði til Seyðisfjarðar* [The Eastfjords from Reyðarfjörður to Seyðisfjörður]. Árbók 2005. Ferðafélag Íslands.

Jón M. Ívarsson. 2020. *Flóamannabók* II. Hraungerðishreppur síðara bindi. Flóamannabók EHF.

Jónas Jónasson frá Hrafnagili. 1934. *Íslenskir þjóðhættir* [Icelandic folk customs]. Ísafoldarprentsmiðja.

Jónas Kristjánsson. 1993. *Handritaspegill* [Manuscript mirror]. Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag.

Lethbridge, Emily. 2020. „Paradís á Íslandi“ [Paradís in Iceland]. Í *Ágústblóm, lesin til heiðurs Ágústu Þorbergsdóttur sextugri 9. september 2020* [*Ágústblóm*, read in honour of Ágústa Þorbergsdóttir on her sixtieth birthday on 9th September 2020], 17–19. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen.

Olsen, Magnus. 1963. „Valhöll með hinar mörgu dyr“ [Valhöll with the many doors]. Í *Þættir um líf og ljóð norrænna manna í fornöld* [Stories about the life and poetry of the Norsemen in ancient times]. Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag.

Ólafur Briem. 1945. *Heiðinn siður á Íslandi* [Pagan customs in Iceland]. Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs.

Sigurður Jónsson á Presthólum. 1834. *Fimmtíu hugvekju sálmar* [Fifty inspirational hymns]. O.M. Stephensen.

Sigurður Vigfússon. 1892. *Árbók 1888–92* [Yearbook 1888–92]. Hið íslenzka fornleifafjelag.

Simek, Rudolf. 1993. *Hugtök og heiti í norrænni goðafræði* [Terms and names in Old Norse mythology], ritstj. Heimir Pálsson, þýð. Ingunn Ásdísardóttir. Heimskringla. Háskólaforlag Máls og menningar.

Sveinn Pálsson. 1983. *Ferðabók: Dagbækur og ritgerðir 1791–97* [Travel book: Diaries and essays 1791–97]. Bókaútgáfan Örn og Örlygur.

Theódór Friðriksson. 1922. *Útlagar* [Outlaws]. Bókaverzlun Arinbj. Sveinbjarnarsonar.

Turville-Petre, E.O.G. 1964. *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. Greenwood Press.

Valgarður Egilsson. 2000. *Í strandbyggðum norðan lands og vestan* [In the coastal settlements in North and West Iceland]. Árbók 2000. Ferðafélag Íslands.

Þorvaldur Thoroddsen. 2004. *Landfræðissaga Íslands* II [Geographic history of Iceland II]. Ormstunga.

Þórgunnur Snædal. 2023. *Rúnir á Íslandi* [Runes in Iceland]. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum.

RECOGNIZING THE SACRALITY OF HELGAFELL

Thomas A. DuBois*

In discussing Helgafell, Terry Gunnell (2018, 36) writes: "from the time of the settlement, people were marking out 'sacred sites' in the landscape, sites which were not only protected in story and tradition, but also demanded both respect and offerings." Matthias Egeler (2018, 81), writing of saga accounts of the nearby Þórsnes thing site and the island of Dritsker, writes: "In a way, through its toponyms, the landscape of Þórsnes was almost as pagan in the thirteenth century as it had been in the ninth." Both Gunnell (2018, 32) and Egeler (2024) relate the notion of reverence at places like Helgafell to the *álagablettir*, places set apart and preserved from ordinary use or encroachment. Kevin Wanner (2009), for his part, notes parallels between the depiction of Helgafell and Mount Sinai/Horeb of Exodus, details he attributes to the influence of the monastery that relocated to Helgafell in 1184. He quotes and translates Hermann Pálsson, who states: "[H]vorki kirkju né klaustri varð þolað að svipta staðinn þeirri helgi, sem frumbygginn á Þórsnesi hafði lagt honum til" ('[N]either church nor monastery dared to deprive the place of that sacredness, which the first dweller on Þórsnes had attributed to it') (Hermann Pálsson 1967, 21; Wanner 2009, 245). The notion of Helgafell as a spiritual and literary hub has been explored by numerous subsequent scholars (e.g., Stefán Karlsson 1987, Drechsler 2021, Stegmann and Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir, forthcoming).

In paying honor to the seminal contributions of Terry Gunnell, I build on these insights concerning Helgafell to delineate some of the seeming paradoxes of the sacralization of natural topography for medieval Icelandic Christians, as well as for Christians more generally. Although in Christianity sacred spaces were constituted through human rituals and therefore could seemingly be established anywhere, in fact, Christian sacred sites were sometimes situated in places that possessed inherent natural qualities that may have contributed to their selection. Sometimes in fact, they were located in places that had already been venerated by prior religious communities—places that can be said to have exercised some agency in their own sacralization. My

* University of Wisconsin-Madison.

discussion draws on the scholars mentioned above as well as on my own past scholarship concerning the ways in which Christian and non-Christian worldviews compete, combine and complete in the medieval North of Europe (DuBois 1999; 2006; 2014). I also draw on Indigenous North American scholarship on sacred places and a line of scholarship that accords both respect and a sense of agency to sacred places.

Indigenous Understandings of Natural Sacred Places

A popular meme depicts a black-clad Jesuit confronting a group of Native Americans. Gesturing toward the horizon, the missionary declares: "Without us, you'd still be worshiping the Sun!" A skeptical Native responds: "Dude, the Sun is real." This insight was conveyed in scholarly terms in Vine Deloria Jr.'s seminal *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1973):

> The structure of [Native American] religious traditions is taken directly from the world around them, from their relationships with other forms of life. … The places where revelations were experienced were remembered and set aside as locations where, through rituals and ceremonials, the people could once again communicate with the spirits. Thousands of years of occupancy on their lands taught tribal peoples the sacred landscapes for which they were responsible (Deloria 1973, 65–66).

Since the 1990s, Lakota visionary Arvol Looking Horse has worked for the recognition of sacred places. In Looking Horse's view, human shrines and rituals are often created to reflect and honor a sacrality that already exists within a place. He writes:

> Our people have strived to protect Sacred Sites from the beginning of time. There needs to be an understanding in the concern of the protection of Sacred Sites that goes deeper than just the issue of shrines built by humans. Our people have built similar objects and shrines to identify and to remind the significance in the power of the Sacred Site. (Looking Horse 2024)

Through Looking Horse's efforts, June 21 has emerged as an international day for the recognition of sacred sites (Looking Horse 2024). For Looking Horse and Deloria, as for many Indigenous people around the world, sacrality is not established in a place through human agency; rather, it manifests itself of its own accord in sacred places, where it can be eventually sensed and reverenced by people, who may add rituals and ceremonies in response to commemorate and maintain engagement. Carl Phelpstead (2014, 8–9), in examining the depiction of the landscape in *Eyrbyggja saga,* characterizes this understanding through reference to Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) "geopiety." Matthias Egeler (2024, 241) discusses a similar understanding with reference to Rayson K. Alex and S. Susan Deborah's (2024) description of "indigenous reverential eco-fear." These formulations echo Mircea Eliade's (1957) classic characterization of spatial hierophany:

> For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others. "Draw not nigh hither," says the Lord to Moses; "put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."
> (Exod. 3:5; Eliade 1957, 20)

Western social scientists have tended to foreground the human role in such experiences of sacrality, focusing on actions and perceptions of people as central to the process of sacralization. Indigenous North American scholars, in contrast, while noting human roles, have tended to acknowledge the places themselves as having agency.

Helgafell as a Sacred Place

For Icelandic settlers, as Gunnell (2018) suggests, Helgafell evoked a sense of inherent sacrality. A lone outcropping of stone and grass rising some 73 meters in height, and separated from the mountains to its south, Helgafell commands a magisterial view of Breiðafjörður to its north and Hvammsfjörður to its east. It juts upward from relatively flat terrain, and because of its distinctive shape easily serves as a landmark for navigation on both land and water. It is a place that stands out.

Fig. 1. Helgafell as viewed from the north.

Fig. 2. Helgafell as viewed from the east, across the waters of Hvammsfjörður.

Fig. 3. Helgafell viewed from the west.

Although the placename Helgafell ('holy mountain') appears to date to the time of settlement, we know details (actual or imagined) of its naming from two sagas written much later: *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga.* Vésteinn Ólasson (2005, 115) supports Hermann Pálsson's (1967, 133–36) conjecture that both sagas were composed at the monastery of Helgafell in the mid-thirteenth century.

In *Eyrbyggja saga,* Helgafell and its environs become first experienced by Hrólfr (Þórólfr) *Mostrarskegg* ('Moster-beard'), a Norwegian chieftain who counts Þórr as "ástvin sin" (*Eyrbyggja saga* 1935, 7, Ch. 4; 'his close friend;' Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards 1989, 28) and who maintains a *hof* ('temple') on the island of Moster. After consulting with Þórr regarding a conflict with the king, Þórólfr decides to migrate to

Iceland, dismantling his temple and taking its pillars and some soil with him (a recurrent narrative detail in the sagas, see Gunnell 2019, 33, 36). On nearing land, Þórólfr launches the pillars into Breiðafjörður and notes where they come to shore, a place he names Þórsnes ('Þórr's peninsula'), not far from Helgafell. The peninsula was still known by that name in the thirteenth century, although it later became known as Jónsnes (Ólafur Lárusson 1935; see discussion Connors 2021, 12).

Although Þórólfr establishes his farm, temple, and thing site on level ground, he does so in the vicinity of, and in direct relation to Helgafell, which he immediately treats with reverence. In a much-quoted characterization that Wanner (2009, 231) suggests is influenced by Exodus, Þórólfr imposes restrictions regarding behavior on and around Helgafell "og trúði, að hann myndi þangað fara, þá er hann dœi og allir á nesinu hans frændr" (*Eyrbyggja saga* 1935, 9, Ch. 4; 'and believed that he and his kinsmen would go into it when they died;' Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards 1989, 30).

Odd Nordland (1969) and Eldar Heide (2022) associate sacred mountains like Helgafell with cults of the dead in Old Norse religious practice, and this aspect comes to the fore later in *Eyrbyggja saga,* when Þórólfr's successor Þorsteinn *þorskabítr* ('Codbiter') drowns while fishing on the fjord and is seen entering the mountain to begin his afterlife. The account states:

> Það var eitt kveld um haustit, at sauðamaðr Þorsteins fór at fé fyrir norðan Helgafell; hann sá, at fjallit lauksk upp norðan; hann sá inn í fjallit elda stóra og heyrði þangat mikinn glaum og hornaskvǫl; ok er hann hlýddi ef hann næmi nǫkkur orðaskil, heyrði hann, at þar var heilsat Þorsteini þorskabít og fǫrunautum hans og mælt, at hann skal sitja í ǫndvegi gegnt feðr sínum. (*Erybyggja saga* 1935, 19, Ch. 11)
>
> One evening in the autumn as Þorsteinn's shepherd was tending sheep north of Helgafell, he saw the whole north side of the mountain opened up, with great fires burning inside it and the noise of feasting and clamour over the ale-horns. As he strained to catch particular words, he was able to make out that Þorsteinn þorskabítr and his crew were being welcomed into the mountain, and that Þorsteinn was being invited to sit in the place of honour opposite his father. (Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards 1989, 38)

Þórólfr and Þorsteinn have found their afterlife in the heart of the mountain. By specifying that the mountain opened on its north side, the text seems to assume direct familiarity with the actual Helgafell, whose northern face is steep and rocky, while its more tapered southern slope provided a windblock for the farm, church, and monastery at its foot. In *Laxdæla saga,* a Christian Gestr Oddleifsson similarly senses the sacrality of Helgafell, asking to be buried near it because, as he puts it: "Þangat hefi ek opt ljós sét" (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 196, Ch. 66; 'I have often seen a light shining there;' Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1969, 211; see also Wanner 2009, 245). Although this detail may be seen as a literary prefiguring of the eventual monastery that comes to be sited there (cf. McCreesh 1980), Helgafell seems to be accorded some agency in this process: the mountain acts as a spiritual magnet that draws people with spiritual proclivities to it or embodies the kind of place that would be experienced as spiritually

charged by a person of a religious nature, a person given, as Harvey Whitehouse (2004) puts it, to an "imagistic" rather than a "doctrinal" mode of religious experience.

According to *Eyrbyggja saga* (1935, 19, Ch. 11, Þorsteinn *þorskabítr*'s grandson Þorgrimr is intended to one day become the priest of Þórr's (Þórólfr's) temple. Eventually known by the name Snorri, he uses his considerable wits and cunning to acquire Helgafell from his brother Bǫrkr (*Eyrbyggja saga* 1935, 25, Ch. 14). When wishing to arrive at a strategy for dispatching some problematic *berserkir*, he invites his ally Styrr to the top of Helgafell because "Þau ráð sízt at engu orðit, er þar hafa ráðin verit" (*Eyrbyggja saga* 1935, 71, Ch. 28; 'Plans made there have never been known to fail;' Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards 1989, 77). Although meeting at the summit of Helgafell affords the men privacy, Snorri's words also seem to signal his awareness of Helgafell as a potent place. When Christianity comes to Iceland, Snorri embraces the new faith and constructs a church at the foot of Helgafell (*Eyrbyggja saga* 1935, 136, Ch. 49).

In chapter 56 of both sagas, Snorri *goði* trades properties with his friend and ally Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir. In Chapter 66 of *Laxdæla saga*, we learn that she has had a church erected at Helgafell, possibly a supplement or replacement of the one created by Snorri (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 196, Ch. 65). The saga states: "Guðrún gerðisk trúkona mikil. Hon nam fyrst kvenna saltara á Íslandi" (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 223, Ch. 76; 'Guðrún became a deeply religious woman, and was the first woman in Iceland to learn the Psalter;' Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1969, 235). When confronted by the ghost of her newly drowned husband Þorkell, she takes refuge in the church (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 223, Ch. 76), and so continual is her nightly prayer that she eventually irritates and uproots a pagan practitioner who came before her. Through a granddaughter's dream, she becomes aware of a *seiðkona* buried directly beneath the place where she kneels:

> Lét Guðrún taka upp fjalar ór kirkjugólfinu, þar sem hon var vǫn at falla á knébeð; hon lét grafa þar niðr í jǫrð. Þar fundusk undir bein; þau váru blá ok illilig; fannsk ok kinga ok seiðstafr mikill. Þóttusk menn þá vita, at þar mundi verit hafa vǫluleiði nǫkkut. Váru þau bein fœrð langt í brott, þar sem sízt var manna vegr. (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 224, Ch. 76)
>
> Guðrún had some planks removed from the church-floor where she was in the habit of kneeling on the hassock. She had the ground underneath dug up, and there they found some bones which were blue and evil-looking, and a brooch, and a large witch's wand. People then realized that this must have been a sorceress's grave. The bones were taken far away to a place where people were least likely to pass by. (Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1969, 235)

The non-Christian practitioner who had been buried beside Helgafell in the past—presumably a member of, or visitor to the household of Þórólfr *Mostrarskegg* or Þorsteinn *þorskabítr*—is literally uprooted and removed so that the sacred place can become more fully associated with the Christian sacred. The narrative event suggests that the church may have been originally sited atop an example of a class of *álagablettir* known as *völuleiðir*, purported graves of sorceresses, one that had been located at the foot of Helgafell.

In some of the same chapters of *Laxdæla saga* in which we see Guðrún grow in piety, we also see her husband Þorkell Eyjólfsson grow in pride, seeking to aggrandize himself through enlarging the buildings at Helgafell and laying out the foundation for a new church (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 218, Ch. 70). Traveling to Norway to obtain timber for the church from none other than King St. Ólafr himself, he irritates the king by planning to build a church equal in size and grandeur to the cathedral Ólafr is in the process of erecting at Trondheim (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 229, Ch. 74). Returning to Iceland, he is drowned in a storm when attempting to ferry this timber across Breiðafjörður during Holy Week: "Fátt eina náðisk af kirkjuviðinum" (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 223, Ch. 76; 'Very little of the church-timber was ever recovered;' Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson 1969, 235). Þorkell and Guðrún's son Gellir eventually completes the planned church to the glory and honor of God (*Laxdæla saga* 1934, 229, Ch. 78): the God who, as noted below, does not need sanctuaries built by human hands.

Helgafell in Christian and Norse Context

In the Gospel of John (18:36) Jesus asserts that his 'kingdom' (*Βασιλεια,* Latin *regnum*) is "not of this world." Christianity makes things Christian through the human performance of rituals like baptism, blessing, and eucharist, which have concrete, worldly manifestations, but much more consequential 'otherworldly' realities sensible only through faith.

These rituals possess the capacity to make any place, person, or object sacred regardless of appearance or location. And yet, the Gospel accounts depict Jesus paying careful attention to certain earthly places in particular in his ministry: In his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) Jesus chooses a mountainside upon which to teach his followers, and in the Transfiguration (Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9, 2 Peter 1) Jesus climbs a mountain with a select few of his disciples to allow them to glimpse the wonders of the promised afterlife. These practices represented a continuity from Jewish tradition, in which sacred mountains played important roles.

Early Christian monastics began to seek out remote places, sometimes the very ones described in the Bible. They settled on the Mount of Beatitudes (the site of the Sermon on the Mount), Mount Tabor (the site of the Transfiguration), and of course at Mount Sinai/Mount Horeb, where an ancient monastery still exists today, its earliest chapel financed by St. Helena in 330. The ascetic life of such early hermits gradually spread to Europe, where monastic cells became established in remote areas like coastal islands and other marginal tracts, a practice replicated in Nordic sites like the Norwegian island of Selja (DuBois 2008) as well as pre-*landnám* Iceland. Christian religion sought out places conducive to practices of physical deprivation and solitude, places in which the distractions and ease of settled life could be heroically resisted, but also places that may have suggested an inherent sense of sacrality.

Not only did people of spiritual persuasion set up residence near or on such natural sites, but they attracted others who came for shorter periods—pilgrims. An avid fourth-century Egeria describes her coming to the Mount Sinai monastery, reading aloud

relevant passages from Exodus, climbing the mountain with reverence, and praying in the church, guided and entertained by local monks (Wilkinson 1971, 97). That Icelanders would come to participate in such pilgrimage is amply attested by the sagas as well as the itinerary written by a returning clerical pilgrim Nikulás in the mid-twelfth century. In addition to visiting Rome and Jerusalem, Nikulás made a point of visiting Mount Tabor (Hill 1983, 178).

A measure of the agency of such natural places in attracting human reverence is the fact that many Christian holy places came to be sited in places that had already been recognized as sacred by previous populations. When St. Paul arrives in Athens in the Acts of the Apostles, he makes its sacred shrine, the Areopagus, the place where he will attempt to convert the Athenians. In his well-known sermon (Acts 17:22–25) he declares: "Deus, qui fecit mundum, et omnia quæ in eo sunt, hic cæli et terræ cum sit Dominus, non in manufactis templis habitat" ('The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands'). Dismissing "manufactis templis," sanctuaries made by human hands, Paul does not deny the potential in-dwelling of God in physical places like the Areopagus. The Christian God may have made all things but seems particularly palpable to humans at certain selected natural sites.

The act of recognizing God's presence in certain natural places, as well as replacing the shrines erected there by earlier worshippers, recurred in Europe on the Italian mountain of Monte Cassino, where St. Benedict of Nursia established a monastery. In a *vita* written by Pope St. Gregory around the year 600, Gregory describes Monte Cassino as a towering mountain crowned by a temple to Apollo. Benedict "broke down the idol, overthrew the altar, burned the groves, and, of the temple of Apollo, made a chapel to St. Martin" ("Life of Our Most Holy Father St. Benedict," Ch. 8; translation slightly altered). In Gregory's account, the deity in the mountain is not an unrecognized God (as Paul asserted at the Areopagus) but rather a demon whom Benedict is able to hear and who scolds Benedict for disturbing his shrines. That the natural place is of importance to both the demon and to God is clear in Gregory's account. Similarly, Gregory recommends Benedict's example to the abbot Mellitus regarding the treatment of sacred sites in England. Dated to the year 601, Gregory's letter states:

> The idol temples of the English should by no means be destroyed, but only the idols in them. Take holy water and sprinkle it in these shrines, build altars and place relics in them. For if the shrines are well built, it is essential that they should be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God. (Howe 1997, 74; cf. also Howe 2002)

For both Gregory and Benedict, sacrality could exist in particular places—be it Mount Sinai, Mount Tabor, Monte Cassino, or Helgafell.

On the Island of Moster, Paul's preaching at the Areopagus and the practice of replacement became vividly (re)enacted. Like the later Helgafell, Moster included an ancient revered natural site—a prominent hill Vetehaugen that rises above the Mosterhamn harbor—a thing assembly place, and the eventual site of a chieftain's hall and Christian church. The island was the birthplace and childhood home of Þóra

Mosturstǫng ('Moster pole'), mother of King Hákon the Good, the first Christian king of a still-pagan Norway (r. 934–961). As noted in *Kristni saga* (ch. 6, 39), the island was also the site of the first church erected by King Ólafr Tryggvason in his quest to Christianize Norway in 995. Óláfr built his church at the edge of Vetehaugen, in close proximity to the ancient Moster thing place. It was at that thing that King St. Ólafr would later establish the first Norwegian *kristenrett* in 1024. According to Oddr munkr's version of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar:* "Óláfr konungr stóð á einum steini háum, at hann mætti öllum auðsær vera ok mál hans at heyra, ok enn er sá steinn þar til minningar" ('King Óláfr stood on a high stone, so that he might be seen by all, and so that his speech could be heard, and that stone is still recalled,' *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar eftir Oddr munk* ch. 24). Through palimpsestic erasure and reinscription, the ancient sacrality of the place, with its prominent thing stone that still stands today, becomes the footstool of a missionary monarch. And in the past life and epithet of Helgafell's first admirer, Hrólfr (Þórólfr) *Mostrarskegg*, Moster becomes a direct antecedent and a model for Helgafell. Sacred places become recognized in the landscape and then attract acts of further sacralization or veneration.

Iceland possesses some eight mountains that go by the name Helgafell, as well as four associated farms (Svavar Sigmundsson 1991, 191). At least some of these mountains show a similar shape and visibility from the sea as the Helgafell of Snæfellsnes (Zori 2010, 82, 94). Inger Storli (2010) has examined the development of thing sites in Norway as places of religious, juridical, and commercial consolidation in the Viking Age. Often located on land of limited agricultural utility near the shores of a body of water, these sites offered people a place to make communal sacrifices and to ensure social and divine accord. The specific combination of sacred mountain, proximity to water, and thing site found at Þórólfr's Helgafell and at Moster is paralleled at Skiringssal (Kaupang) in southern Norway, where Dagfinn Skre (2007) and Stefan Brink (2007) have noted the importance of a prominent hill, again called Helgefjell, some 25 meters in height beside a small lake where sacrifices were made since time immemorial. A raised area near the lake became the site of the Þjóðalyng thing, a chieftain's hall, and eventually a church. Skiringssal qualifies as a 'central place,' a place of power that commanded prominence over a long period of centuries (Brink 1996; Fabech 1999; Thurston 2001; Skre 2007). Another such central place was Uppsala, where, as Olof Sundqvist (2011; 2016; 2017) has shown, late pagan Norse religion came to embrace the production and maintenance of manmade structures as a means of signaling and also sequestering the sacred, a practice modeled on Roman tradition. The hall or church became what Sundqvist (2016) terms an "arena for higher powers," separate from its natural surroundings and yet, at Uppsala, as elsewhere, still connected to them. The hall and church are established in a place long recognized as sacred.

Helgafell: Toward an Integrative Understanding

In a marvel of citizen cartography, Justus Thomas (2021) maps the hundreds of places in the United States that contain the terms "devil," "Satan," or "hell." Like the meme

about the Jesuit and the sun mentioned at the outset of this paper, Thomas's map wryly points to an important aspect of the colonization/Christianization of North America: In many cases, the places stigmatized through demonic names were longstanding sacred sites of local Indigenous nations, places literally demonized through colonial renaming. Such religious animosity is sometimes recognizable in medieval accounts of Nordic Christianization. In *Kristni saga*, when the missionary Friðrekr demonstrates his superiority over the spirit stewart ("ármaðr") that dwells in a local stone, he not only banishes the spirit but causes the stone to break to pieces (ch. 2, 35–36; cf. DuBois 1999, 50). Similarly, the missionary Stefnir responds to Icelandic resistance to his preaching by deciding to destroy "hof ok hörga, en brjóta skurðgoð" ('temples and places of worship, and to break up idols') (ch. 6, 40).

Yet the depictions of Helgafell in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Laxdæla saga* evince a different attitude: one of replacement and displacement, certainly, but also one of respect for Helgafell as a place of longstanding, inherent, enduring sacrality. In this way it was akin to the distant but still revered and recognized Mount Sinai, Mount Tabor, Monte Cassino, or Moster, places that must have been familiar to medieval Icelanders at least by name, if not also by physical experience through pilgrimage. These are places accorded their own agency, attracting followers and acting as privileged sites for human encounters with the sacred. They participate in and shape the sacred events that occur on or near them. In respecting that sense of enduring sacrality noted by Hermann Pálsson (1967) and advocated by Arvol Looking Horse (2024), perhaps the writers of the sagas recalled that when the prophet Elijah came to recognize God's voice not in a wind or earthquake or fire, but rather in a "still small voice" (1 Kings 19), he did so not just anywhere, but in a particular location: while standing on a recognized holy mountain, Mount Sinai.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Eyrbyggja saga = Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds. 1935. *Eyrbyggja saga.* Íslenzk fornrit 4. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, transl. 1989. *Eyrbyggja saga*. Penguin.

Hill, Joyce, ed. 1983. "From Rome to Jerusalem: An Icelandic Itinerary of the Mid-Twelfth Century." *Harvard Theological Review* 76, no. 2: 175–203.

Kristni saga = Guðni Jónsson, ed. 1946. *Íslendinga sögur*. Vol. 1. 13 vols. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.

Laxdæla saga = Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed. 1934. *Laxdæla saga.* Íslenzk fornrit 5. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, transl. 1969. *Laxdæla saga*. Penguin.

Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (eftir Odd munk) = Guðni Jónsson, ed. 1957. *Konunga sögur.* 3 vols. Íslendingasagnaútgáfan.

Wilkinson, John, ed. and transl. 1971. *Egeria's Travels.* SPCK.

Secondary Sources

Alex, Rayson K. and S. Susan Deborah. 2019. "Ecophobia, Reverential Eco-Fear, and Indigenous Worldviews." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 26, no. 2: 422–29.

Brink, Stefan. 1996. "Political and Social Structures in Early Scandinavia: A Settlement-Historical Pre-Study of the Central Place." *Tor* 28: 235–81.

———. 2007. "Skiringssal, Kaupang, Tjølling—The Toponymic Evidence." In *Kaupang in Skiringssal*, edited by Dagfinn Skre, 53–63. Aarhus University Press.

Connors, Colin Gioia. 2021. "A Social Analysis of Place-Names in *Hrafnkels saga*." PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Deloria Jr., Vine. 1973. *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion.* Putnam.

Drechsler, Stefan. 2021. *Illuminated Manuscript Production in Medieval Iceland: Literary and Artistic Activities of the Monastery at Helgafell in the Fourteenth Century.* Brepols.

DuBois, Thomas A. 1999. *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age.* University of Pennsylvania Press.

———. 2006. "Rituals, Witnesses, and Sagas." In *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspective: Origins, Changes and Interactions*, edited by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere, 74–78. Nordic Academic Press.

———. 2008. "Sts Sunniva and Henrik: Scandinavian Martyr Saints in Their Hagiographic and National Contexts." In *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Thomas A. DuBois, 65–102. University of Toronto Press.

———. 2014. "Anatomy of the Elite: 'Learned' vs. 'Folk' in the Analysis of Avowedly Pre-Christian Religious Elements in the Sagas." In *Folklore in Old Norse, Old Norse in Folklore*, edited by Daniel Sävborg and Karen Bek-Pedersen, 59–82. Nordistica Tartuensia 20. University of Tartu Press.

Egeler, Matthias. 2018. *Atlantic Outlooks on Being at Home: Gaelic Place-Lore and the Construction of a Sense of Place in Medieval Iceland.* FF Communications 314. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

———. 2024. *Landscape, Religion, and the Supernatural: Nordic Perspectives on Landscape Theory.* Oxford University Press.

Eliade, Mircea. 1957. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion.* Harcourt, Brace & World.

Fabech, Charlotte. 1999. "Centrality in Sites and Landscapes." In *Settlement and Landscape. Proceedings of a Conference in Århus, Denmark, May 4–7 1998*, edited by C. Fabech and J. Ringtved, 455–74. Jutland Archaeological Society.

Gunnell, Terry. 2018. "The Power of Place: Icelandic *Álagablettir* Legends in a Comparative Context." In *Storied and Supernatural Places: Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas,* edited by Ülo Valk and Daniel Sävborg, 27–41. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 23. Finnish Literature Society.

———. 2019. "Spaces, Places, and Liminality: Marking Out and Meeting the Dead and the Supernatural in Old Nordic Landscapes." In *Landscape and Myth in North-Western Europe*, edited by Matthias Egeler, 25–44. Brepols.

Heide, Eldar. 2022. "Old Icelandic and Sami Ancestor Mountains: A Comparison." In *Religions around the Arctic: Source Criticism and Comparisons*, edited by H. Rydving and K. Kaikkonen, 31–76. Stockholm University Press.

Hermann Pálsson. 1967. *Helgafell: Saga höfuðbóls og klausturs* [Helgafell: The history of a center and monastery]. Snæfellsnes 2. Snæfellingaútgáfan.

Howe, John, M. 1997. "The Conversion of the Physical World: The Creation of a Christian Landscape." In *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, edited by James Muldoon, 63–78. University Press of Florida.

———. 2002. "Creating Symbolic Landscapes: Medieval Development of Sacred Space." In *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*, edited by John Howe and Michael Wolfe, 208–23. University Press of Florida.

McCreesh, Bernardine. 1980. "How Pagan are the Icelandic Family Sagas?" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 79, no. 1: 58–66.

Nordland, Odd. 1969. "Valhall and Helgafell: Old Norse Religion." In *Syncretism*, edited by Sven S. Hartman, 66–99. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Ólafur Lárusson. 1935. "Þing Þórólfs Mostrarskeggs." *Skírnir* 41: 182–211.

Phelpstead, Carl. 2014. "Ecocriticism and *Eyrbyggja saga*." *Leeds Studies in English, New Series* 45: 1–18.

Skre, Dagfinn. 2007. "The Emergence of a Central Place: Skiringssal in the 8th Century." In *Kaupang in Skiringssal*, edited by Dagfinn Skre, 431–44. Aarhus University Press.

Stefán Karlsson. 1987. "Lovskriver i to lande: Codex Hardenbergensis og Codex Belgsdalensis" [Law scribes in two countries: Codex Hardenbergensis and Codex Belgsdalensis]. In *Festschrift til Alfred Jakobsen* [Festschrift for Alfred Jakobsen], edited by Jan Ragnar Hagland, Jan Terje Faarlund, and Jarle Rønhovd, 166–84. Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forlag.

Stegmann, Beeke and Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir, eds. Forthcoming. *Book Production at Helgafell? New Perspectives on a Suspected Scriptorium in 14th-Century Iceland*. Stofnun Árna Magnussonar í íslenskum fræðum.

Storli, Inger. 2010. "Court Sites of Arctic Norway: Remains of Thing Sites and Representations of Political Consolidation Processes in the Northern Germanic World during the First Millennium AD?" *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 43, no. 2: 128–44.

Sundqvist, Olof. 2011. "An Arena for Higher Powers: Cult Buildings and Rules in the Late Iron Age and the Early Medieval Period in the Mälar Region." In *Ideology and Power in the Viking Age and Middle Ages*, edited by Gro Steinsland, Jon Viðar Sigurðsson, Jan Erik Rekdal, and Ian Beuermann, 163–210. Brill.

———. 2016. *An Arena for Higher Powers: Ceremonial Buildings and Religious Strategies for Rulership in Late Iron Age Scandinavia.* Brill.

———. 2017. "The Temple, the Tree and the Well: A *Topos* or Cosmic Symbolism at Cultic Sites in pre-Christian Northern Europe?" In *Old Norse Mythology—Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell, and Jens Peter Schjødt, with Amber Rose, 163–90. The Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature.

Svavar Sigmundsson. 1991. "Analogi i islandske stednavne" [Analogy in Icelandic place names]. In *Analogi i navngivning* [Analogy in Naming], edited by Gorden Albøge, Eva Meldgaard, and Lis Weise. 189–97. NORNA Förlaget.

Thurston, Tina L. 2001. *Landscapes of Power, Landscapes of Conflict: State Formation in the South Scandinavian Iron Age.* Kluwer Academic.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience.* University of Minnesota Press.

Vésteinn Ólasson. 2005. "Family sagas." In *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, edited by Rory McTurk, 101–18. Blackwell.

Wanner, Kevin J. 2009. "Purity and Danger in Earliest Iceland: Excrement, Blood, Sacred Space, and Society in *Eyrbyggja saga*." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5: 213–50.

Whitehouse, Harvey. 2004. *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission.* AltaMira.

Zori, Davide Marco. 2010. "From Viking Chiefdoms to Medieval State in Iceland: The Evolution of Social Power Structures in the Mosfell Valley." PhD dissertation, UCLA.

Digital Resources

Bible, transl. 1987. *The New American Bible.* Devore and Sons. https://vulgate.org/.

Looking Horse, Arvol. 2024. "WPPD History." World Peace & Prayer Day. https://www.worldpeaceandprayer.com/about-1 accessed 24 April 2024.

Plantinga, Harry. 1993–2020. "Life of Our Most Holy Father St. Benedict." Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL). https://www.ccel.org/ccel/gregory/life_rule.html accessed 14 May 2024.

Thomas, Justus. 2021. "Places Named after Satan in the US." Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/a1yxr6/oc_places_named_after_satan_in_the_us_posted_an/ accessed 14 May.

"EVERYTHING IN RINGS IS BOUND" THE FOUNDATION MYTH OF GOTLAND

Olof Sundqvist*

During the last few years, I have often zoomed with my dear friend Terry Gunnell from Gotland, where I have a little house. This amazing and historically rich island has rarely been investigated by historians of religions. I will therefore discuss an account of how Gotland was detected from this perspective. It is found in the introduction to *Guta saga*, that is, a short appendix to the manuscript called Codex A (B 64 Holmiensis) of the *Guta Lag*, which is the only surviving manuscript of the text in Old Gotlandic and held in the Royal Library in Stockholm. There is no heading over the appendix; the title *Guta saga* was given to it by Carl Säve in an article published in 1852. Codex A was according to C. J. Schlyter (1852) written by one hand around 1350. *Guta saga* is lacking in Codex B of the *Guta Law* (AM 54 4to) which was written by David Bilefeldt in 1587. He copied a manuscript from 1470 and most likely the appendix was lacking also there (Holmbäck and Wessén 1979, lxiv–lxxxix). *Guta saga* was probably composed sometime between 1220 and 1330. At that time, Gotland and Sweden had for more than 200 years been integrated into the cultural and political community of Western Christianity. Schlyter divided the saga into six chapters, where chapters 2, 5 and 6 discuss the legal and ecclesiastical relations between Gotland and the Swedish kingdom, while chapters 3 and 4 concern the Christianisation of Gotland, and can thus be seen in the context of the new ecclesiastical situation. These chapters explain why *Guta saga* could be conceived as a natural complement to the law. In the present study, chapter 1 will be discussed, especially the introduction, which goes as thus according to Christine Peel's text and translation (1999, 2–3):

> Gotland was first discovered by a man named Þieluar. At that time the island was so bewitched that it sank by day and rose up at night. That man, however, was the first that brought fire to the island, and afterwards it never sank again. This same Þieluar had a son

* Stockholm University, Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies.

named Hafþi, and Hafþi's wife was called Huitastierna. These two were the first to settle in Gotland. The first night that they slept together, she dreamed a dream. It was just as if three snakes were coiled together within her womb, and it seemed to her as though they crawled out of her lap. She related this dream to Hafþi, her husband, and he interpreted it as follows:

"*Alt ir baugum bundit.*
Boland al þitta varþa,
ok faum þria syni aiga."
"Everything in rings is bound.
Inhabited this land shall be;
we shall beget sons three."

He gave them each a name, while they were still unborn:

"*Guti al Gutland aiga,*
Graipr al annar haita,
ok Gunfiaun þriþi."
"Guti shall Gotland claim,
Graipr the second by name
and Gunfiaun the third."
They later divided Gotland into thirds, in such a way that Graipr the eldest inherited the northern third, Guti the middle third and Gunfiaun the youngest inherited the southernmost. Subsequently, from these three men, the population of Gotland increased…

In what follows, the question of whether the opening of the *Guta saga* can be considered a foundation myth will be discussed first. Then, the fire ritual mentioned there is investigated. For the purpose of shedding more light on this practice, it will be compared to ceremonies carried out during land claiming in Viking Age Iceland, which is called "hallowing land" (*at helga sér land*) in Old Norse sources. In order to understand the stanza that begins with "everything in rings is bound," the connection between *þing*-assemblies, sanctuaries and ritual enclosures equivalent to the Old Norse *vébǫnd* are examined in pre-Christian contexts on Gotland and in the rest of the Nordic region. At the very end, a proposal is tested that rings could be understood as a symbolic representation of *þing*-sanctity in late Viking Age Gotland and the rest of Scandinavia.

The Introduction of *Guta Saga* as a Foundation Myth

The story about Þieluar, Hafþi, and Huitastierna could, as noted above, be regarded as a foundation myth. A state, a nation or a social community belong to those institutions which need an impressive creation account. They often legitimate themselves by referring to origins as something heroic, graced or inspired (cf. Lincoln 2014, 1–2). In a classical article, Lauri Honko (1972) stated that the *form* of myths are often narratives. They can be recited during the rites and solemnities of the ceremonies. However, the myth can be brought to life in other ways too, for instance, in the form of a ritual drama, a dance, or as an image or symbol. The motif of Huitastierna's dream in *Guta saga*, for instance, may have been depicted on a picture stone (AD 400–600) found at Smiss in När

parish, Gotland (Fig. 1) (Peel 1999, xxiii), but the time gap between the story and the image makes the interpretation uncertain.

According to Honko, the *content* of myths may vary, but one link that ties them together is the fact that they often contain information about "decisive, creative events in the beginning of time." Myths often "provide a special authority for stories of how culture originated." Such stories are often accepted by the social group "as the ultimate source of its identity." The introduction to *Guta saga* includes a cosmogonic narrative, which can undoubtedly be considered fundamental and decisive for the Gotlanders and the organization of their society. It describes how Þieluar discovered Gotland and how it was inhabited by his son Hafþi, his wife Huitastierna and their children Guti, Graipr and Gunfiaun. The brothers divided Gotland into thirds, in such a way that they inherited one-third each, and from them, the population increased. It is likely that this account was a source of many Gotlanders' identity, and legitimised their claim to own and farm the island.

Figure 1. Huitastierna's dream? Picture stone from Smiss, När parish, Gotland, c. AD 400-600.

Moreover, Honko stated, that myths often *function* as models. Myths thus provide exemplars for in principle all human and perceptible activity in the events of the great beginning. It is thus possible to obtain from myths "a more or less uniform explanation of the world at the basis of which lie the creative, the formative activities of the gods, culture heroes, etc." In *Guta saga*, it is stated that Gotland in primordial times was so bewitched that it sank by day and rose up at night. The cultural hero Þieluar brought fire to the island, and afterwards, it never sank again. Perhaps the bringing of fire to the island could be seen as a prototypical act of hallowing land, that is, an exemplary activity

made by the mythic ancestor, which must be repeated for all Gotlanders when claiming land.

The founding figure Þieluar is much debated and some scholars have related him to the mythic young servant of the pagan god Þórr, called Þjálfi (Andrén 2012). He is described by Snorri Sturluson in the myths where the *Æsir*-god encounters Útgarðaloki and Hrungnir (*Gylfaginning* chs 44–47; *Skáldskaparmál* chs 4, 17). Þjálfi appears in a late tenth-century poem *Þórsdrápa* (sts 9–10) by Eilífr Goðrúnarson (SkP 3, 95–99). Snorri quotes it in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18, when narrating the myth where Þórr encountered Geirrøðr. The connection between Þieluar and Þjálfi must indeed be considered uncertain. Place-names testify, however, that Þórr was worshipped on Gotland (Olsson 1996, 136f.). The first element of the compound *Torsburgen*, for instance, evidences this. This name refers to a large hill fort in Kräklingbo parish. Þórr's appearance in Gotlandic place names may create a faint link between Þieluar and Þjálfi (Andrén 2012). The existence of oral traditions related to Þieluar is anyhow indicated by a Bronze Age grave lying in the parish of Boge called *Tjelvars grav*. This name could, however, be secondary to *Guta saga,* so it cannot be regarded as a source (Peel 1999, xviii). Þieluar's son Hafþi had a wife called Huitastierna, which is a common cow name. This story could thus be interpreted as an alternative creation myth, to the one attested in *Gylfaginning* ch. 6, where the cow Auðhumbla initiated the theogony and the pedigree of gods (Peel 1999, xvii). In the early medieval folk belief, Þieluar, could be regarded as a mythical ancestor for the Gotlanders, and a figure resembling the god Tuisto in Tacitus' *Germania* ch. 2 who had a son Mannus. The Germanic people's race had three sons as its founders: the tribes Ingaevones, Herminones, and Istaevones. Þieluar, his son Hafþi and the three grandsons, Guti, Graipr and Gunfiaun, could definitely be perceived as a mythical pedigree for the Gotlanders. For them, the account in *Guta saga* provided a coherent view of the foundation of Gotland, including the division into three regions of this island. This foundation account was most likely seen as something natural and eternally valid. It was determined at the beginning of time and caused by the acts of the primordial beings, Þieluar, his son Hafþi and Hafþi's wife, Huitastierna (cf. Lincoln 1999).

Finally, Lauri Honko states that the *context* of myth is usually ritual. Myth provides an ideological content of ritual, while the ritual brings the creative events of the beginning of time into life and enables them to be repeated here and now in the present. Whether the introduction of *Guta saga* was recited or enacted in a ritual performance is hard to tell. It seems as if Honko implied that behind the rites, one always expects to find myths that inspired or motivated them ideologically. Such theories have more recently been questioned by ritual theorists (see Staal 1979; Rappaport 2000). However, Terry Gunnell (1995; 2001; 2006; 2012; 2018) has shown in many important contributions how the early Scandinavians during annual gatherings of the community recited and enacted the old mythic traditions. Hence, the foundation myth in *Guta saga* may in one or another sense be related to the ritual act of bringing fire to a new land, hallowing it and claiming possession thereof.

Hallowing Land

In Old Norse texts, the act of hallowing land for oneself is called *at helga sér land* (Strömbäck 1928). The claimed land was often dedicated to a god and thereby granted by divine authority. As a consequence of this, it also gained sanctity. Most likely, rituals of consecrations were performed on such occasions. The purpose of these performative rituals was to separate the sacred from the profane sphere (Eliade 1987; cf. Smith 1987). The sanctified land and sanctuaries had to be freed from evil powers and dedicated to the deity. Thus, it could be a place where men could encounter the divine world during cult. Therefore, certain ritual restrictions and taboos had to be observed there. According to Mircea Eliade (1987, 32), the consecration of a territory or a place should be seen as a repetition of the cosmogony; "to organize a space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the god." In the Old Norse sources such performative rituals were executed by the human settlers of Iceland. Whether these rites were a repetition of a divine model is not established. Most likely the agents of such rituals intended to show that from now on it was legally their land, and that their rules/restrictions must be followed by the community. *Landnámabók* (chs S297, H258) reports that the *hofgoði* Þórhaddr from Mære took down his *hof* and brought all the soil of the sanctuary and the high-seat posts to Iceland. When he came to Stǫðvarfjǫrðr he proclaimed the *Mærinahelgi* ('Mære sanctity') over the entire fjord area and stated that nothing was allowed to be killed there, except the animals on the farm. Most likely these ritual regulations were based on ancient traditions and customs deriving from Mære. The compound *Mærinahelgi* indicates that. The second element of it, *-helgi*, is related to the adjective *heilagr* ('holy') and the verb *helga* ('make holy, consecrate') (de Vries 1961, 218–21). In an analysis of the semantics of *heilagr* in Old Norse poetry, Margaret Clunies Ross (2020, 38–39) concluded that there is no support for a notion of an impersonal power of holiness in pre-Christian Scandinavia. On the other hand, she stated that the gods were *heilagr* ('holy'). Rituals, objects, and places became sacred when they were associated with these gods and therefore people protected them with restrictions. The sanctification of land in older time periods included notions that gods or cultural heroes were also perceived as present and perhaps regarded as protectors of the hallowed land.

Acts of hallowing lands and places, including the practice of carrying fire to the new land, are well preserved in the medieval written sources referring to pre-Christian Iceland. In these texts, it is also stated that the new land was dedicated to a pagan god. According to *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 4, whose historical source value has been debated (see Olsen 1966), the Þórr worshipper Þórólfr *Mostrarskegg* emigrated from the island of Mostr, Sunnhǫrðaland, in Norway, to the isthmus of Þórsnes in western Iceland. There he threw overboard the high-seat posts with 'Þórr images' from his old sanctuary and declared that he would settle at any place in Iceland where Þórr chose to send the posts ashore. The posts reached land at a ness in Breiðafjǫrðr. Þórólfr called that place Þórsnes, and a river close to that place was called Þórsá. In a similar way to Þieluar in *Guta saga*, Þórólfr also brought fire to his new land and carried it around the land he claimed. He settled at Hofsvágr and erected a *hof* on his farm called Hofstaðir. Just inside the door of

the *hof* the high-seat posts were placed, and beyond that point, the whole building was considered a sanctuary (*var allt friðarstaðr*). Inside it was a structure built with a raised platform (*stalli*), where a solid ring was placed, upon which people had to swear all their oaths. Not far from his farm on the headland, there was a mountain which Þórólfr regarded as sacred. Therefore, no one was allowed even to look at it without first having washed himself. No living creature on this mountain, neither man nor beast, was to be harmed until it left of its own accord. Þórólfr called this mountain *Helgafell* 'the holy mountain' and he believed that he and his kinsmen would enter it when they died. He held his courts on the point of the headland, and there he started the district assembly. This place was so holy (*svá mikill helgistaðr*) that he would let no one desecrate it, either with bloodshed or with excrement. Most of these rituals, restrictions and dedications are also mentioned in the narrative about Þórólfr, preserved in the historically more reliable *Landnámabók*. The Sturlubók and Hauksbók versions (chs S85, H73) explicitly state that Þórólfr built and dedicated the new *hof* to Þórr (*gerði þar hof mikit ok helgaði Þór*). The ritual restrictions connected to the mountain *Helgafell* appear also in *Landnámabók* (chs S85, H73). We may assume that Þórólfr had applied similar dedications to Þórr, rituals and restrictions to the sanctuary, assembly site and sacred landscape of Mostr, his old home, before his emigration to Iceland.

In *Eyrbyggja saga*, but not in *Landnámabók*, it is recorded that Þórólfr carried fire around the land he claimed. The historicity of this ritual may be supported by other texts. *Landnámabók*, for instance, tells of the *goði* and new settler called Jǫrundr, who erected a *hof* at Svertingsstaðir, to the west of Fljót in north-western Iceland. "There was an unclaimed piece of land east of Fljót, between Krossár and Jǫldusteinn, and Jǫrund carried fire around it and dedicated it to the *hof* sanctuary" (*þat land fór Jǫrundr eldi ok lagði til hofs*) (ch. S346). *Landnámabók* states that Helgi *enn magri* consulted Þórr as to where he should put in Iceland. Later he built big fires (*gerði eld mikinn*) at every estuary to hallow his land claim (*helgaði sér svá allt herað*) (ch. S218, see also ch. H184). According to *Vatnsdœla saga* ch. 10, Sæmundr carried fire according to old custom and thereby appropriated land (*fór með eldi at fornum sið ok nam sér land*).

Some consecration rituals in these narratives were associated with Þórr. In *Landnámabók* (chs S85, H73) we read, for instance, that Þórólfr promised to dedicate his entire land claim to Þórr (*at helga Þór allt landnám sitt*) and call it after him. The Melabók version ch. 8 describes similar rituals performed by Ásbjǫrn, who hallowed land and dedicated it to Þórr and called it Þórsmǫrk (*helgaði landnám sitt Þór ok kallaði Þórsmǫrk*). Perhaps it was thought that Þórr also protected the hallowed land which was named after him. In mythical contexts, Þórr protects rituals, objects and persons by means of consecrating (*vígja*) them, sometimes with his hammer Mjǫlnir (see *Gylfaginning* chs 44 and 49; cf. *Þrymskviða* st. 30). On the Glavendrup-runestone from Fyn (900–950) it says: *Þōrr vīgi þessi rūnaʀ* ('May Þórr consecrate [implicitly protect] these runes') (Sundqvist 2017).

It is possible that the sanctification of territory and dedications to a primordial being attested in the Old Norse sources also occurred in eastern Scandinavia. The information in *Guta saga*, for instance, that cultural hero Þieluar was the first who brought fire to the

island indicates this. It seems here as if the chaotic land was cosmicised by means of the fire ritual. This prototypical act was performed by Þieluar, the mythical founder. Whether the first settlers of Gotland also performed such rituals is uncertain, but place names show that they did dedicate land and places to Þórr (see above). *Guta saga* indicates that ritual restrictions were observed also at certain sites in Gotland. The pagan sanctuaries were even conceived by recent converts as still holy and therefore also regarded as protected places. An account from *Guta saga* ch. 3 may support this idea: Botair of Akebäck had a church in Kulstäde built, but it was soon burnt down by the islanders. He therefore built a new church at Vi which was an old cult place in Gotland. When the people of the island also wanted to burn it down, Botair's father-in-law, Likkair Snielli from Stenkyrka, said as follows: "Do not persist in burning the man and his church, since it stands at Vi (*han standr i Vi*), below the cliff." The church was left unburned since the place was considered sacred since old times and still is. If we follow Clunies Ross's argument related to *heilagr* and *vé*, the situation in *Guta saga* could imply a syncretistic context, where the respect for the old gods still lingered on at Vi/Visby when Botair's church was erected.

In both *Guta saga* and the Old Norse sources, ritual restrictions are often related to shrines called *vi*/*vé*. To kill a man in a sacred space (*víg í véum*) was strongly forbidden and punished with curses and outlawry. This idea is attested in runic inscriptions from Sweden. According to the Oklunda-inscription (ninth century), in Östergötland, and close to Gotland over the Baltic Sea, protection against violence could be found at one such *vi* site: "Gunnarr cut these runes. And he fled under penalty. Sought this sanctuary [*Sotti vi þetta*]…" (Jansson 1987, 37). Scholars have often used this inscription combined with medieval provincial laws in a retrospective way to support the idea of pre-Christian asylum at pagan sanctuaries (e.g. Ruthström 1988, 68–74). This method has been questioned by Bertil Nilsson (1991, 474–84). He does not rule out the possibility that the inscription may have been influenced by Christian ideas. Asylum and the concept of peace existed very early as a Christian institution. When the concept *vi* appears in a ninth-century runic inscription by Oklunda, it is more likely that the context is pagan. In medieval Swedish laws, churches are indeed often conceived of as asylum sites, also in Gotland. According to *Guta Lag* and the section called *Af mandrapi* [On manslaughter], Fardhem, Tingstäde and Atlingbo were considered asylum churches, where a man who committed manslaughter had safety and sanctuary for forty days:

> And when that time has expired, he must ride to the place where he wants to draw up his peace circle (*hann bandu will hafa dragit*), and draw it around three farms, and so far into the wood from the three homesteads that it lies equidistant from other (i.e. from these and the other) homesteads, which lie on the other side of the wood, if he has (i.e. should he in any case have) permission from those who own the property… Then he has sanctuary within his circle (*hafi siþan helg i bandu sinni*) …

Likkair's statement above and the context of the Oklunda rune-slab indicate that these notions of sanctuary within bond (*helgi i bandu*) had continuity from the pagan period.

Þing, Sanctuary and *véb̨nd*

In *Guta saga* it is stated that Huitastierna had a dream which Hafþi interpreted in a verse as thus: "Everything in rings is bound. Inhabited this land shall be; we shall beget sons three. Guti shall Gotland claim, Graipr the second by name and Gunfiaun the third." It has been noted that the stanza and the following prose differ from each other. In the stanza, it says that Guti claimed all Gotland, while the prose mentions that Gotland was divided into thirds (*þriþiungar*), and Guti only had the middle third of the island. Further, in the prose, Graipr is the oldest, while the verse suggests that Guti was the eldest of brothers. These differences have led researchers to perceive the verse as older than the prose (Blomkvist and Jackson 1999, 20). It has also been argued that the expression *Alt ir baugum bundit* includes two terms which both have religio-judicial contexts, namely Old Gotlandic **baugr* m. 'ring' and the verb **binda* 'to bind' (cf. **band* n. sg. 'bond, prohibition;' ON *binda* v., *band* n. sg. 'bond', *bǫnd* n. pl. 'divine powers'). According to Blomkvist and Jackson, **binda*/**band* refers to ritual acts and props of assembly places described in Old Norse prose texts, where "attendants of the *þing* put staffs around a place of the *þing* and fasten a surrounding band on them. The bands were called *véb̨nd*, *vé* meaning 'holy place'" (1999, 21). In *Egils saga* ch. 56 there is a detailed description of a court circle at *Gulaþing*, in Sogn, Norway, where twelve men from each of the three *fylkir* gathered. Together they symbolically represented the community which was related to the *Gulaþing*. In order to separate the sacred space of the court from the profane sphere, staffs made of hazel were set in a circle (*í hring*). This wood had strong associations with ritual and apotropaic among Germanic people (Lincoln 1994, 62). On these staffs, the *véb̨nd* ('sacred bonds') were connected. The area inside the bonds must not be violated. The saga describes how Egill's enemy King Eiríkr violated it with his warriors. According to a *lausavísa* (21), attributed to Egill, the king is described as "the one who does injury to the [pagan] sanctuaries/ assembly sites [or sanctuary/assembly site]" (*þanns vé grandar*).

Could Þieluar's expression "everything in rings is bound" and the territorial division in thirds be interpreted as if every third was regarded as a circle of peace that was not to be violated? These thirds were represented by an assembly each, including a sanctuary within a circle constituted by bonds (*helgi i bandu*). The northern third had *Tingstäde* as an assembly site, where one of the asylum churches was erected. The middle had *Gutnalaþing* at Roma as an assembly place. It was also the *þing*-site for all Gotlanders. *Suderþing* was the assembly for the southern third, situated in the parish of Mästerby, not far from Klintehamn. The division of Gotland into three judicial districts is attested in a papal letter from 1213, but it could be much older. When *Guta saga* says "everything in rings is bound," it could in a concrete sense refer to the ritual enclosures at the court circles and the sanctity (**friþr*) that was proclaimed there, the intention of which was to create peace in each third and perhaps also overall Gotland. Such thought would definitely suit a foundation myth. In the myth, the peace shone over all thirds of Gotland in a paradigmatic way.

Could this peace in pre-Christian Gotland have been connected with the presence of the pagan gods at certain assembly places, where peace was held? *Guta saga* ch. 1, mentions that "the whole island held the highest sacrifice" (*land alt hafþi hoystu blotan*), but it does not tell where this "highest sacrifice" took place. Perhaps it was held at the communal assembly place of Roma, where the medieval assembly was held for all Gotlanders. According to *Guta saga*, it was called **gutnalþing* ('the Gotlanders' general assembly'). For a long period the composite *gutnal-* (*gutna* + *al*), was uncritically interpreted as 'the sanctuary of the Gotlanders,' where the last element **al* was explained as an equivalent to Gothic *alhs* 'sanctuary' (Olsson 1996, 137). This interpretation has however been problematised since the noun *al* is not attested in the Old Scandinavian languages (Brink 1992). Perhaps the highest sacrifice of the Gotlanders took place in *Visby*. The first element of this compound name, *Vis-*, may be interpreted as the genitive of an appellative *vi* 'pre-Christian sanctuary' (Olsson 1996, 23ff.). *Guta saga* states thus: "Then, later there was a sacrifice at Vi" (*Þa eptir þan tima var blotan i Vi*). This place was situated "below the cliffs" and is usually identified with present-day Visby or a site nearby. Perhaps the chief sanctuary in the middle third, either it was at Roma or Visby, included a *pars pro toto* symbolism, and thus represented not only the district but also the whole island. It was perceived as inviolable since the pagan deities received sacrifices and dwelt there.

The *Guta Law* describes in an indirect way how the pre-Christian cult took place in Gotland. It states in the section *aff blotan* ('concerning sacrifice') that sacrifices (*blotan* f. sg.) and the worshipping of ancient gods (actually *haita* 'to invoke' or 'to pray') at the traditional cult places were not permitted. It is forbidden to pray or invoke groves (*a hult*), sanctuaries (*a vi*) or grave howes (*a hauga*), which seems to reflect some kind of ancestor cult performed at the burial mounds. No man should pray to heathen gods (*a guþ*) either. Most likely the term **guþ* (here attested in plural) refers to images representing pagan gods since they in this context are related to other ritual objects/places, such as the sacred groves and the grave mounds etc. More problematic is the concept **stafgarþr* (m. sg.) in the *Guta Law*, which is also attested in *Guta saga* ch. 1:

> Prior to that time, and for a long time afterwards, people believed in groves and grave howes, holy places and ancient sites (*a… stafgarþa*), and in heathen idols. They sacrificed their sons and daughters, and cattle, together with food and ale. … The whole island held the highest sacrifice on its own account, with human victims, otherwise each third held its own. But smaller assemblies held a lesser sacrifice with cattle, food, and drink. Those involved were called 'boiling companions,' because they all cooked their sacrificial meals together.

The appellative **stafgarþr* is included in c. 50 proper place names (Swedish *ägonamn*) in Gotland. The last element in the composite (**garþr*) is unproblematic. It means 'fence, enclosure; farm, estate; yard.' The first element **staf-* is enigmatic, however, and it has not yet found a satisfactory solution. Ingemar Olsson (1996, 139–41) pointed out a relation between place-names including *stafgarþar* and Iron Age house foundations. Anders Andrén (2020) has developed this suggestion and proposed that the house foundations described by Olsson may have been reused as enclosures, within which one

or more ritual posts (**staf-*) were erected. He connects the concept *stafgarþar* with places designated with a last element *-vi*, such as *Lilla Ullevi* in Uppland and *Götavi* in Närke. These places have been investigated archaeologically and include enclosures with one or several staves, possibly in cultic contexts. As argued above, it was always the presence of divine powers that made the sanctuary sacred and inviolable. Therefore people protected them with rituals and symbolic boundaries. It could thus be suggested that the enclosed area at *stafgarþar* was considered inviolable since the staves represented the gods. This interpretation is supported by the meaning of theophoric place names, such as *Nälsta* (attested (*in*) *nærthastaff* 1354) in Uppland. It has an appellative Old Swedish *staver* (ON *stafr*; cf. Lithuanian *stãbas*, and Latvian *stabs* 'image of a god, idol') as the second element and the name of the deity Njärd as the first element. This name means thus "the cult image (stave) of the deity Njärd." (Vikstrand 2001, 292–95). We may conclude that pagan sanctuaries and assembly sites in Gotland could have included enclosed and protected areas where staves representing pagan deities were erected.

Rings as Symbolic Representation of Þing-Sanctity

Old Norse sources report that *hof*-sanctuaries in Iceland also included a ritual object designated as *stallahringr*, *hringr* or *baugr*, that is, oath rings. These rings were used when swearing oaths in judicial-religious contexts. In connection with them, there were officials known as *goðar*. In the *Hauksbók* redaction of *Landnámabók* ch. 268 it says thus:

> A ring weighing two ounces or more should lie on the *stalli* in every chief *hof* building, and every *goði* should have this ring upon his arm at all public law-motes at which he should be at the head of affairs, having first reddened it in the blood of a neat which he himself had sacrificed there. Every man who was there to transact any business, as by law provided by the Court, first had to take an oath on that ring and name for the purpose two or more witness in evidence. He was to say: I take oath upon the ring, a lawful one so help me Freyr and Njǫrdr and the Almighty God (*hinn almáttki áss*).

The expression *hinn almáttki áss* has often been interpreted as referring to Þórr, however, these descriptions have been debated. Olaf Olsen (1966) argued that these narratives do not say anything at all about pre-Christian religion and ancient customs in Iceland. According to him, neither was the tradition in *Landnámabók* based on ancient tradition. The oath formula, for instance, with the expression 'the Almighty God' (*hinn almáttki áss*), gave a Christian impression (Olsen 1966, 49). This distrustful attitude towards the historical source value of the Sagas of the Icelanders and *Landnámabók* has been a *Leitmotiv* in twentieth-century saga research. In principle, all information about pre-Christian religion has been rejected by some scholars. Occasionally, this critical attitude has been pushed too far (Brink 1996), because there is information in the more reliable sources which may confirm some of the information in the sagas. There are, for instance, some passages in the Eddic poetry where the custom of swearing oaths on rings may be confirmed. *Hávamál* st. 110 mentions a *baugeiðr* ('ring-oath'), and *Atlaqviða in grœnlenzka* st. 30 states that oaths were sworn on Ullr's ring (*eiða opt um svarða … oc at hringi Ullar*).

In a previous study, the present author argued that the fire-steel shape and an assumed Þórr's hammer image on the runic inscribed Forsa-ring from Hälsingland (ninth century) indicate that this object had a Viking Age background and that it played an essential role in the cult of Þórr (Sundqvist 2017; Fig. 2).

It was Stefan Brink (1996) who first suggested that the Forsa-ring originally was an ancient "oath-ring" which was kept at the general assembly and cultic site of Hög in Hälsingland. According to Brink, it concerned a pre-Christian legal enactment for the attendance of a cultic site called *vi*. Brink felt that the term *liuðrettr* ('the law of the people') on the ring referred to the law of Hälsingland, which during this period only consisted of some common customs, legal rules and enactments detached from their context, as we may see in the inscription on the Forsa ring. The ring represented not only the law of Hälsingland but also the people living there.

Figure 2. An oath ring with an assumed Þórr's hammer at the bottom? Forsaringen, Hs 7, Forsa Church, Hälsingland, Sweden, ninth or tenth century.

Figure 3. Pagan men with their oath rings? The image with the *sonargǫltr* is on this stone, above this motif. Tängelgårda, Picture stone, Lärbro parish, Gotland, eighth century.

We cannot rule out that also oath-rings at the assemblies in Gotland, symbolised the Gotlanders, their law, including the peace (**friþr*) that was held under common gatherings.

Such rings are perhaps worn by men in a ritual procession on a Gotlandic picture stone (eighth century). Maybe this procession takes place in conjunction with the swearing of oaths at a special offering of a sacrificial boar (*sonargǫltr*) called *sónarblót* in Old Norse contexts and a ceremonial drinking designated *bragafull* (cf. Oehrl 2018, 169–75; see Fig. 3).

A connection between rings and notions of sanctity can be attested by the Old Norse compound *baugshelgi* (f.). According to the *Gulaþing Law* ch. 198, this noun refers to the state of a freed slave who has protection and may not be violated with physical violence.

To sum up, the introduction of *Guta saga* contains a foundation myth, related to the creation of the society of Gotlanders. It describes how the cultural hero Þieluar discovered Gotland and how it was inhabited by his three grandchildren, who divided it into thirds. Whether the paradigmatic fire ritual performed by Þieluar was enacted by the first Gotlanders is not attested, however, in Iceland such rituals were produced by the early settlers. It seems as if the Icelandic inhabitants dedicated the land claim to Þórr and thereby it gained sanctity. Perhaps also some places in Gotland, such as Torsburgen, were dedicated to the Æsir-god. The expression "everything in rings is bound" may be interpreted as a reference to the notion that each third of Gotland was regarded as a circle of peace that was not to be violated. These thirds were represented by assembly places, including sanctuary circles constituted by bonds (*helgi i bandu*). Perhaps oath-rings (**baugar*) appeared at these places, which symbolised the sanctity which prevailed and dominated the assembly.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Collin, H. S. and C. J. Schlyter, eds. 1827–1877. *Corpus iuris Sueo-gotorum antique … Samling af Sweriges gamla lagar* [*Corpus iuris Sueo-gotorum antique …* A collection of the Old laws of Sweden]. 13 vols. Berlingska boktryckeriet/Gleerup.

Egill Skallagrímsson's *Lausavísur*. See SkP 5.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed. 1939. *Vatnsdæla saga. Hallfreðar saga. Kormáks saga. Hrómundar þáttr halta. Hrafns þáttr Guðrúnarsonar*. Íslenzk fornrit 8. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds. 1985 [1935]. *Eyrbyggja saga*. Íslenzk fornrit 4. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa*. See SkP 3.

Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 1988. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning.* Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

———, ed. 1998. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál. I. Introduction, Text and Notes*. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

Gylfaginning. See Faulkes 1988.

Hávamál. See Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014.

Holmbäck, Åke and Elias Wessén, eds. and transl. 1979 [1933–1946]. *Svenska landskapslagar: Vol. 5. Skånelagen och Gutalagen* [The Swedish country laws: Vol. 5. The Law of Skåne and the Law of the Gotlanders]. Gebers.

Hutton, M., ed. and transl. 1992 [1914]. Cornelius Tacitus. *Germania*. In *Agricola, Germania, Dialogus*, edited and translated by M. Hutton. Harvard University Press.

Jakob Benediktsson, ed. 1986. *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*. Íslenzk fornrit 1. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds. 2014. *Eddukvæði*. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Peel, Christine, ed. and transl. 1999. *Guta saga: The History of the Gotlanders*. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

———, ed. and transl. 2009. *Guta Lag: The Law of the Gotlanders*. Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London.

Schlyter, C. J., ed. 1852. *Codex iuris Gotlandici, cum notis criticis, variis lectionibus, nova versione suecana, glossariis et indicibus nominum propriorum. Gotlands-lagen*. *Corpus iuris Sueo-gotorum antique …* 7. Berlingska boktryckeriet.

Sigurður Nordal, ed. 1988 [1933]. *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Íslenzk fornrit 2. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Skáldskaparmál. See Faulkes 1988.

SkP 3 = Gade, Kari Ellen, in collaboration with Edith Marold, eds. 2017. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3: Poetry from Treatises of Poetics*. Brepols.

SkP 5 = Clunies Ross, Margaret, †Kari Ellen Gade and Tarrin Wills, eds. 2022. *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 5: Poetry in Sagas of Icelanders*. Brepols.

Secondary Sources

Andrén, Anders. 2012. "Servants of Thor? The Gotlanders and their Gods." In *News from Other Worlds: Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology and Culture, in Honor of John Lindow*, edited by Merrill Kaplan and Timothy R. Tangherlini, 101–10. Wildcat Canyon Advanced Seminars, Occasional Monograph Series 1. North Pinehurst Press.

———. 2020. "Stafgarþar Revisited." In *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink*, edited by Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart, 109–20. TCNE 32. Brepols.

Blomkvist, Torsten and Peter Jackson. 1999. "*Alt ir baugum bundit:* Skaldic Poetry on Gotland in a Pan-Scandinavian and Indo-European Context." *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 114: 17–29.

Brink, Stefan. 1992. "Har vi haft ett kultiskt **al* i Norden?" [Did we have a cultic **al* in the Nordic countries?] In *Sakrale navne* [Sacred names], edited by G. Fellows-Jensen and B. Holmberg, 107–21. NORNA-rapporter 48. NORNA förlaget.

———. 1996. "Forsaringen—Nordens äldsta lagbud." [The Forsa rune ring—The oldest law in Scandinavia]. In *Beretning fra femtende tværfaglige vikingesymposium* [Report from the fifteenth interdisciplinary Viking symposium], edited by Else Roesdahl and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 27–55. hikuin.

Clunies Ross, Margaret. 2020. "What does *heilagr* mean in Old Norse?" In *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink*, edited by Irene García Losqiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart, 25–42. TCNE 32. Brepols.

Eliade, Mircea. 1987. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by W. R. Trask. Harcourt.

Gunnell, Terry. 1995. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Boydell and Brewer.

———. 2001. "*Hof*, Halls, *Goðar* and Dwarves: An Examination of Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic Hall." *Cosmos* 17: 3–36.

———. 2006: "'Til holts ek gekk:' Spatial and Temporal Aspects of the Dramatic Poems of the Elder Edda." In *Old Norse Religion in Long Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions: An International Conference in Lund, Sweden 3–7 June 2004*, edited by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere, 238–42. Nordic Academic Press.

———. 2012: "The Drama of the Poetic Edda: Performance as a Means of Transformation." In *Progranicza teatralności: Poezja, poetyka, praktyka* [Theatrical frontiers: poetry, poetics, practice] edited by Andrzeja Dąbrówki, 13–40. Studia Staropolskie, Series Nova. Instytut Badań Literackich Pan Wydawnictwo.

———. 2018. "Early Representations of Old Nordic Religions in *Drama."* In *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception: Vol. 1. From the Middle Ages to c. 1830*, edited by Margaret Clunies Ross, 421–46. Brepols.

Honko, Lauri. 1972. "The Problem of Defining Myth." In *The Myth of the State*, edited by Tore Ahlbäck, 7–19. Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 6. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Jansson, Sven B. F. 1987. *Runes in Sweden*. Translated by Peter Foote. Gidlunds.

Lincoln, Bruce. 1994. *Authority: Construction and Corrosion*. Chicago University Press.

———. 1999. *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship*. Chicago University Press.

———. 2014. *Between History and Myth: Stories of Harald Fairhair and the Founding of the State*. Chicago University Press.

Nilsson, Bertil. 1991. "Frids- och asylföreskrifter rörande den medeltida sockenkyrkan." [Peace and asylum regulations concerning the medieval parish church]. In *Kyrka och socken i medeltidens Sverige* [The church and the parish in medieval Sweden], edited by Olle Ferm, 473–504. Studier till det medeltida Sverige 5. Riksantikvarieämbetet.

Oehrl, Sigmund. 2018. *Die Bildsteine Gotlands: Probleme und neue Wege ihrer Dokumentation, Lesung und Deutung*. 2 vols. Likias.

Olsen, Olaf. 1966. *Hørg, hov og kirke: Historiske og arkæologiske vikingetidsstudier* [*hörgr*, *hof* and church: Historical and archaeological studies of the Viking Age]. Gad.

Olsson, Ingemar. 1996. *Gotländska ortnamn* [Gotlandic place names]. Ödins.

Rappaport, Roy A. 2000. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 110. Cambridge University Press.

Ruthström, Bo. 1988. "Oklunda-ristningen i rättslig belysning" [The Orklund carving in a legal light]. *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 103: 64–75.

Säve, Carl. 1852. "Om Gotlands äldsta fornlämningar" [About Gotland's oldest ancient monuments]. In *Annaler for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie*, 130–70.

Smith, J. Z. 1987. *To Take Place: Towards Theory in Ritual*. Chicago University Press.

Staal, Frits. 1979. "The Meaninglessness of Ritual." *Numen* 26, no. 1: 2–22.

Strömbäck, Dag. 1928. "Att helga land: Studier i Landnáma och det äldsta rituella besittningstagandet" [Consecrating land: Studies on *Landnáma* and the oldest ritual occupation]. In *Festskrift tillägnad Axel Hägerström den 6 september 1928 av filosofiska och juridiska föreningarna i Uppsala* [Festschrift dedicated to Axel Hägerström on 6th September 1928 by the philosophical and legal associations in Uppsala], 198–220. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Sundqvist, Olof. 2017. "Blod och blót: Blodets betydelse och funktion vid fornskandinaviska offerriter" [Blood and *blót*: The meaning of blood and its function in ancient Scandinavian sacrifical rites]. *Scripta Islandica* 68: 275–308.

Vikstrand, Per. 2001. *Gudarnas platser: Förkristna sakrala ortnamn i Mälarlandskapen* [Places of the gods: Per-Christian sacred place names in the Mälar region]. Acta Academiae regiae Gustavi Adolphi 77. Studier till en svensk ortnamnsatlas utgivna av Thorsten Andersson 17. Swedish Science Press.

de Vries, Jan. 1961. *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Brill.

CATTLE, SNAKES, AND MILK: DECODING WESTERN SLAVIC JEWELLERY FROM THE VIKING AGE

Leszek Gardeła*

Introduction

Research on Viking Age mentalities occupies a unique place in medieval studies, largely because the period from the eighth to the eleventh centuries is remarkably well represented in both the archaeological record and extant medieval written accounts. These sources collectively provide a wealth of information for researchers interested in unveiling the more subtle aspects of history. In the past twenty years, therefore, considerable attention has been devoted to the 'material culture of cult and magic,' the burials of presumed ritual specialists (e.g. Price 2002; Ulriksen 2011; Gardeła 2016; Kastholm and Margaryan 2021; see also Gardeła, Bønding, and Pentz 2023), as well as to complex notions of human-animal relations and numinous places in the landscape (e.g. Jennbert 2011; see also Gardeła and Kajkowski 2023a).

Notably, many new discoveries enhancing our understanding of Norse beliefs and ritual practices have been made possible by amateur metal detectorists, particularly in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (e.g Klæsøe et al. 2020). Their efforts have brought to light literally hundreds of artefacts, many of which were previously unknown from archaeological sites excavated in more 'traditional' ways (e.g. Pentz 2018; 2023; Wicker 2020). Processing, analysing, and publishing this substantial and constantly expanding corpus of evidence is now one of the most urgent tasks for the international scholarly community (e.g. Gardeła 2020; 2021; 2022b; 2022c; Gardeła, Pentz, and Price 2022; Jessen 2023; Petersen 2023).

While over the last two decades our understanding of Norse pre-Christian mindsets has significantly improved, academic knowledge of the worldviews of non-Norse

* Gerda Henkel Stiftung, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München, Germany.

societies in the broader Viking world – particularly the Slavs and Balts – remains comparatively weaker (for recent overviews of Slavic and Baltic beliefs, see Kawiński and Szczepański 2016; Gardeła 2017; Szczepanik 2018; 2020; Kajkowski 2019; Łuczyński 2022; Rosik 2023). This disparity arises from various factors, including complicated socio-political circumstances, differing research agendas, and perhaps most significantly, the nature of the available data.

The Slavs constitute the largest ethnolinguistic group in Europe, traditionally divided into three main branches: western, eastern, and southern (e.g. Brather 2008; Buko 2008 with further references therein). Today, the Western Slavic branch primarily encompasses Czechs, Kashubians, Poles, Silesians, Slovaks, and Sorbs. The Eastern Slavic branch includes Belarusians, Russians, Rusyns, and Ukrainians. Among the Southern Slavs are Bosniaks, Bulgarians, Croats, Gorani, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Slovenes.

Although Scandinavian interactions with the Western and Eastern Slavs were particularly strong between the ninth and eleventh centuries and have been studied for a long time (e.g. Roslund 2007; Naum 2008; Morawiec 2009; Gardeła 2024a), our scholarly understanding of these multifaceted cross-cultural encounters is in many regards incomplete. One particular aspect that remains understudied and which certainly deserves attention is the occurrence of Slavic artefacts endowed with religious meanings in Viking Age Scandinavia (but see Gardeła in press-d).

Drawing methodological and theoretical inspiration from previous research into Scandinavian pre-Christian religions, this paper aims to contribute to the debate on Western Slavic paganism 'at home' and abroad in the wider Viking world. The starting point is a corpus of Western Slavic jewellery featuring three-dimensional figurative representations of animals. Selected finds from this group will then be discussed in more detail and interpreted in light of recent observations on the 'animal style' (Gardeła in press-b; in press-c), the theory of 'citation' (Williams 2016a; 2016b), and relevant textual sources. Such an interdisciplinary approach, considering the longevity of universal and deeply ingrained ideas, is characteristic of Professor Terry Gunnell's research into pre-Christian religions. It is hoped that he will find this contribution inspiring, relevant, and useful for his future work.

Western Slavic Jewellery

The corpus of Western Slavic jewellery embraces a vast array of body adornments which could be worn on the hands and/or arms (e.g. rings, bracelets/armrings), around the neck (e.g. chains, neckrings, pendants), and on the head (so-called temple rings; Pol. *kabłączki skroniowe*, Ger. *Schläfenringe*) (e.g. Kóčka-Krenz 1993; Brzeziński 2007 with further references therein). Jewellery was crafted from various materials, including silver, copper alloys, gold, and occasionally bone, antler, and amber. The finest pieces were created using complex techniques such as filigree and granulation, showcasing the highly sophisticated level of craftsmanship among the Western Slavs.

Temple rings are among the most frequently encountered metal adornments in the archaeological record of the Western Slavic area (Musianowicz 1948–1949; Bukowski 1960; Kóčka-Krenz 1993, 41–83). The name of these objects precisely reflects their intended purpose – they were worn on the head's temples, usually attached to a special headband or veil. Archaeological investigations show unequivocally that temple rings served as 'material markers' of Slavic women, manifesting identity and cultural affinity, much like the iconic oval brooches in Scandinavia. Interestingly, however, in very rare instances temple rings may have been employed by non-Slavic individuals, as in the case of the person buried in grave nr 4 in the Viking Age cemetery at Fyrkat (Gardeła in press-e).

Temple rings exist in a diverse array of shapes and sizes, often specific to particular regions. Many Western Slavic temple rings feature geometric designs and decorations, making it difficult to ascertain whether they were meant to convey symbolic meanings due to the absence of figurative features. However, there are certain types of temple rings that carry realistic representations of animals, indicating that these may have held special significance (Kóčka-Krenz 1993, 78–79). One such type will be discussed in more detail further below.

Kaptorgas are also very characteristic elements of Western Slavic jewellery. Similar to the aforementioned temple rings, they are regarded by archaeologists as material markers of identity and cultural affinity of their wearers (Profantová and Šilhová 2010; Sztyber 2010; Profantová and Daněček 2017; Zawol 2018). Essentially, *kaptorgas* are small rectangular or trapezoid containers some of which have detachable lids, allowing their users to easily access their contents. *Kaptorgas* were conventionally worn around the neck and suspended from chains or organic strings. One characteristic aspect of *kaptorgas* is that they often carry representations of animals, either real (birds, horses) or fantastic.

Due to space constraints, a comprehensive overview of all categories of Western Slavic jewellery is impossible. However, for the purposes of the present study, it suffices to note that nearly every category includes variants featuring schematic or realistic animal motifs. Taken collectively and viewed in the broader context of Western Slavic material culture – e.g. weaponry, riding equipment, tools, and various utensils (spoons, ladles, combs), ceramics and metal dining ware – it is clear that they constitute an important component of a broader phenomenon which has been labelled as the 'Western Slavic animal style.' Interestingly, the types of animals depicted by artists, their specific configurations, and their consistent repetition across various categories of objects, echo similar tendencies in Scandinavian art. This phenomenon vividly reflects what Howard Williams (2016b, 407) describes as 'citation:'

> […] practices of selection and deployment of artefacts, substances, images, architectures, monuments, and spaces that, separately and in combination, created mnemonic material references to other things, places, peoples and times.

Before we discuss the potential symbolic properties of selected types of Western Slavic jewellery with animal motifs, it is essential to begin with a succinct introduction to the principles of this style.

The Western Slavic Animal Style and its Regional Expressions

The Western Slavic animal style emerged in the ninth century and was particularly prominent in the elite art of Great Moravia (a complex political organism including territories which are now part of Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine), where it adorned items of jewellery and martial equipment (Kouřil 2014; Macháček et al. 2024).

Great Moravian elite artefacts decorated in this style, including weaponry, riding equipment, and jewellery, conventionally feature realistic and schematic representations of birds, snakes, and horses (e.g. Galuška 2014; Pieta 2014, 240). After the fall of Great Moravia in the early tenth century, some animal style motifs were transformed and adopted in the elite art that developed in Bohemia (Boháčová and Profantová 2014; Frolíková-Kaliszová 2023, 135–40). Subsequently, around the late tenth century, aspects of this art were embraced by the Piast dynasty in the historical region of Greater Poland (Gardeła in press-b; in press-c; see also the seminal study of Żak 1959; on the Piast dynasty in the Viking Age, see Urbańczyk 2012; 2017). The following debate will specifically focus on one particular branch of the Western Slavic animal style that developed in Poland during the late tenth and eleventh centuries. Similar to the art of Great Moravia and Bohemia, horses, cattle, birds, and snakes held particular significance for the Slavs living in Poland, suggesting a shared worldview or, at the very least, shared artistic tastes (Fig. 1).

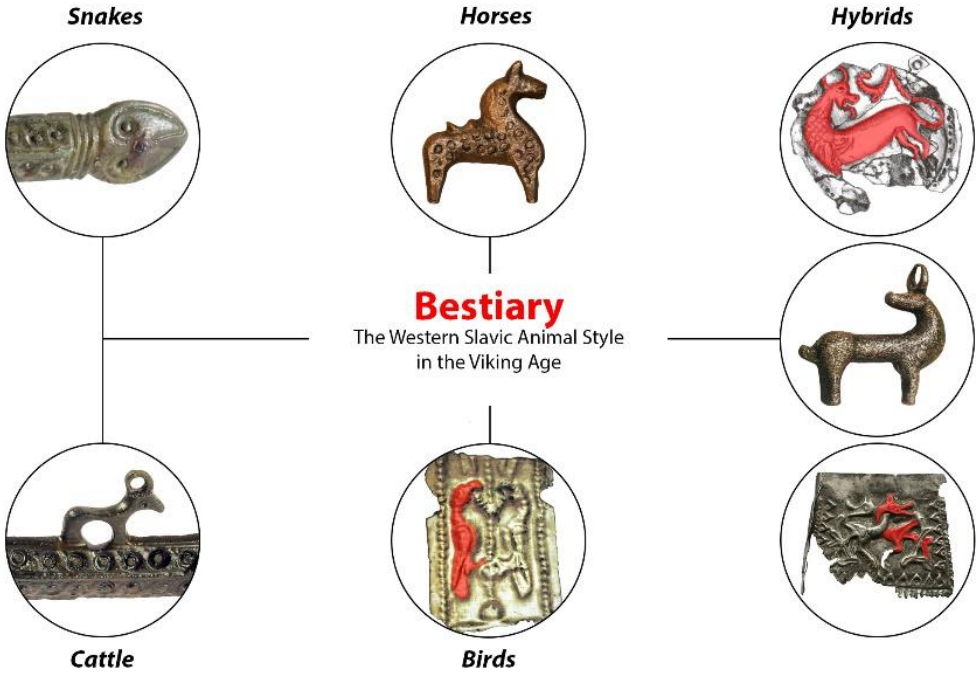


Figure 1. The bestiary of the Western Slavic animal style from Poland. Image design by Leszek Gardeła.

In recent years, the corpus of artefacts with animal motifs from Poland has grown substantially, allowing for a cautious attempt to define the fundamental features of this regional animal style (e.g. Posselt and Szczepanik 2017; Szczepanik 2017; Gardeła 2018; 2022a; 2024a; in press-a; in press-b; in press-c; Gardeła, Kajkowski, and Ratajczyk 2019; Gardeła and Kajkowski 2021; 2023b with further references therein). In summary, the animal style from Poland exhibits the following traits:

- **Material and context**: Representations of animals appear predominantly on artefacts made of silver and copper alloys. Their sporadic presence on objects made of organic material suggests that the animal style was a luxury creation, primarily intended for elite environments and serving as a form of their 'visual identification.'
- **Artistic expression**: Animal motifs could be depicted in either highly realistic or schematic manners. To the untrained eye, various artistic 'simplifications' may be mistakenly associated with floral or geometric motifs.
- **Specific configurations**: Animals often appear in very specific configurations, suggesting the existence of a sophisticated 'visual grammar.' For instance, horses tend to be depicted alongside birds, while cattle are often shown with snakes. Additionally, it appears that the artists consistently repeated the number three across various categories of objects (Fig. 2). This pattern suggests that the number three held significant symbolic meaning, possibly as a 'magic number' for the Western Slavs.
- **Distinctive features**: In contrast to Scandinavian styles of the Viking Age, animals in Western Slavic art are not typically incorporated into interlace motifs.

Having now provided sufficient contextual information about Western Slavic jewellery and the animal style, we can move on to the core part of the present study and concentrate our attention on the symbolic properties of two distinct types of artefacts, namely temple rings and *kaptorgas* with realistic three-dimensional representations of animals.

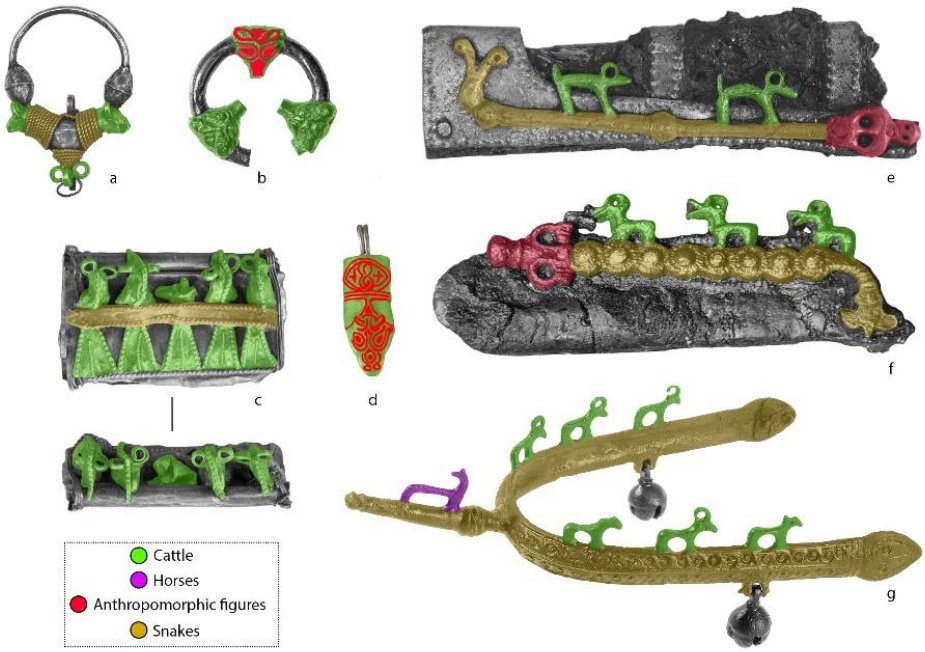


Figure 2. The visual grammar of the Western Slavic animal style and the repetition of the number three as seen in different categories of Western Slavic objects: a – temple ring from an unknown location in Poland. Photo courtesy of the British Museum; b – strap distributor from Lutomiersk, Poland. Photo courtesy of Muzeum Archeologiczne i Etnograficzne w Łodzi; c – *kaptorga* from Dramino-Piaski, Poland. Photo courtesy of Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie; d – animal head terminal from Borucin, Poland. Photo by Leszek Gardeła; e – knife sheath from Brześć Kujawski, Poland. Photo by Leszek Gardeła; f – zoomorphic spur from Ciepłe, Poland. Photo courtesy of Sławomir Wadyl. Image design by Leszek Gardeła.

Temple Rings and *Kaptorgas* with Animal Motifs

The first category of artefacts under scrutiny is a relatively small group of silver temple rings featuring realistic representations of animal heads. In the archaeological literature published so far, these heads have been interpreted as those of rams, horses or cattle (e.g. Brzeziński 2007, 104–5; Kajkowski 2024, 88). Careful first-hand investigations of a substantial portion of the find-corpus, conducted by me in 2023–2024, have led to the conclusion that the artists actually intended to depict cattle (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Selection of temple rings with animal heads: a – Tańsk-Przedbory, Poland; b – Unknown location, Poland; c – Unknown location, Poland. Cattle heads are highlighted in green and snakes are highlighted in yellow. Photos and image design by Leszek Gardeła.

Another significant observation is that the said temple rings have *three* cattle heads, not two as previously suggested (e.g. Kóčka-Krenz 1993, 78–79; Kajkowski 2024, 88). The heads on the left and right sides of the triangular 'body' of the temple ring are always

very realistic, whereas the head at the bottom is schematic. Additionally, virtually all known specimens are adorned with twisted silver wires encircling the necks of the animals. As will be argued below, this detail was probably more than just decoration.

The geographical distribution of temple rings of the type that concerns us here is fairly broad, with findspots in Greater Poland, Kuyavia, Lesser Poland, Pomerania, Warmia and Masuria as well as the territories of present-day Germany (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) (e.g. Kóčka-Krenz 1993, 78–79; Jelińska 2013; Szczurek et al. 2017). Statistically speaking, however, most of them stem from Greater Poland, suggesting that – like many other Western Slavic animal style objects – they were manufactured in the heart of the Piast state.

The second category of artefacts that interests us includes rectangular *kaptorgas* featuring realistic, three-dimensional representations of horned quadrupeds. Similar to the case discussed above, there is some disagreement among researchers regarding the type of animals depicted. While some argue that the quadrupeds are rams or horses (e.g. Brzostowicz and Stempin 2009, 60–61), others believe they are cattle (e.g. Gardeła 2024b; Kajkowski 2024, 88). Interestingly, while the aforementioned temple rings are nearly identical, the *kaptorgas* display considerable diversity in both size and the number of animals represented, ranging from three to nearly ten. Consistently, the animals depicted are always horned and often (though not always) have a thin band or stripe of silver laid over their backs, sometimes adorned with a zigzag pattern. In cases where the silver band is absent, the *kaptorgas* feature wavy filigree ornaments behind the animals' backs or at their sides. These motifs likely have significance beyond mere decoration, which we shall explore further in the section below (Fig. 4).

The geographical distribution of *kaptorgas* with figurative representations of horned cattle is extensive, stretching from Greater Poland and Pomerania all the way to Denmark. Recently, one such specimen was discovered in a hoard from Lille Karleby on Sjælland (e.g. Szczurek et al. 2017; Horoszko et al. 2016; Kastholm, Nielsen, and Jensen 2017; Jensen 2023). The largest concentration of such *kaptorgas* is noted in Greater Poland, which strongly implies that – just like the temple rings discussed above – this is where they were manufactured in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. It is vital to note, however, that their particular design was probably not invented in Greater Poland, but stemmed from Great Moravia and Bohemia, where chronologically older, and in some regards stylistically different, specimens have been noted.

After presenting the physical characteristics of temple rings and *kaptorgas* with images of cattle, we can move on to explore the possible symbolic meanings these items may have had for the Western Slavs in the Viking Age.

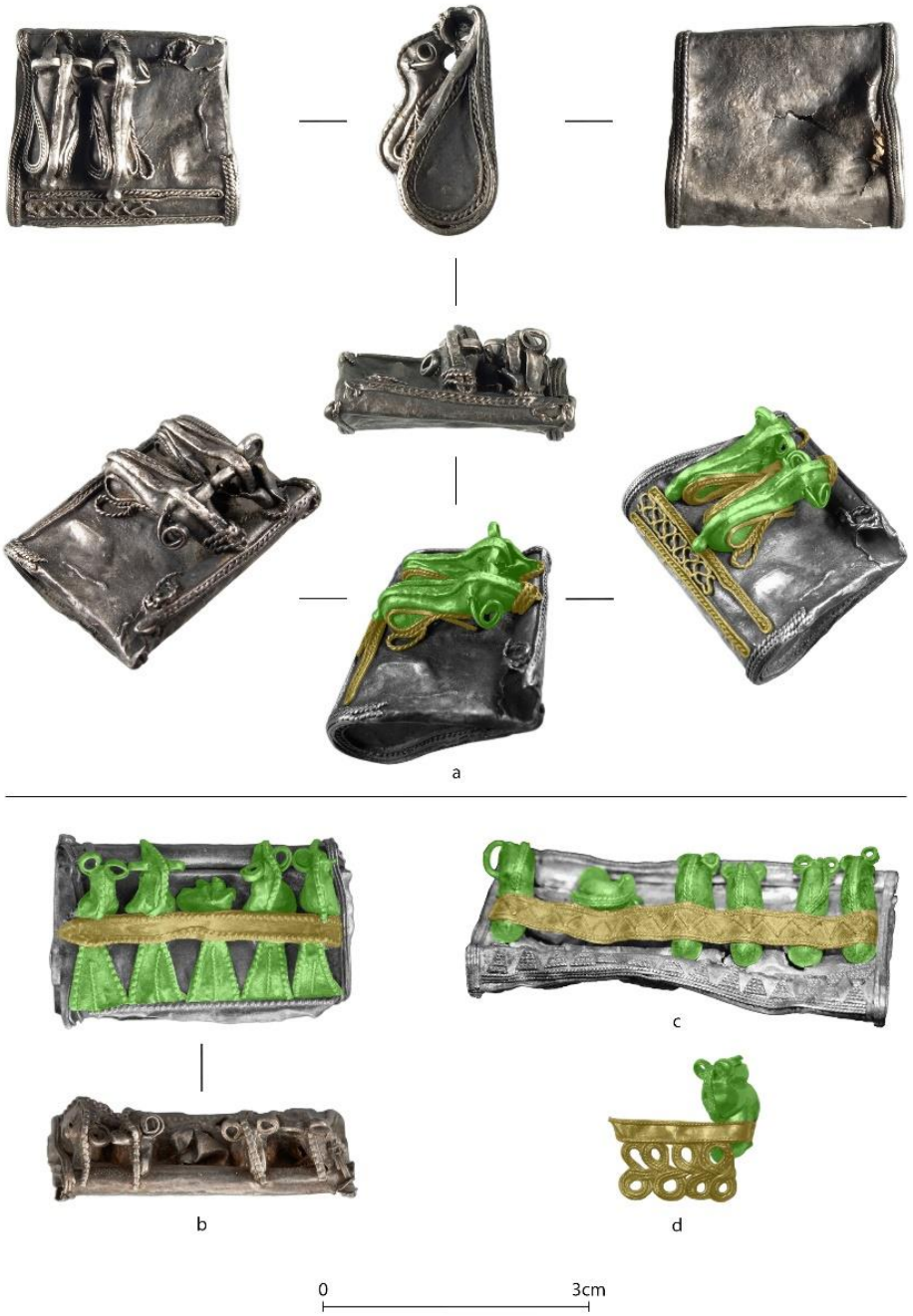


Figure. 4. Selection of *kaptorgas* with animals: a – Lille Karleby, Denmark. Photo by Cille Krause/ROMU: Roskilde Museum; b – Dramino-Piaski, Poland. Photo courtesy of Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie; c – Wielonek, Poland. Photo courtesy of Agnieszka Łukaszyk; d – Dziekanowice, Poland. Photo courtesy of Agnieszka Łukaszyk. Cattle are highlighted in green and snakes are highlighted in gold. Image design by Leszek Gardeła.

Temple Rings and *Kaptorgas* Decoded

While animal motifs in Western Slavic art evoke admiration for the craftsmanship of early medieval artists, it is unlikely that they served purely aesthetic purposes. Medieval texts strongly suggest that all four types of animals that feature in the animal style – namely, birds, cattle, horses, and snakes – were potent symbols for the Slavic people (Álvarez-Pedrosa 2021). Deciphering their meaning-content poses a formidable challenge, but by identifying recurring themes in the depictions of these creatures, one can anticipate uncovering some of the fundamental (presumably Indo-European) messages embedded in them by their creators.

Cattle held crucial importance for agrarian societies, including the Slavs. Primarily, cattle provided milk, essential for everyday subsistence, and were also used to facilitate work in the fields, such as ploughing. Even after their passing, cattle had multiple applications. Their hides could be processed into various leather products, such as straps, belts, shoes, pouches, bags, saddles, and other equestrian equipment. Additionally, their bones could be transformed into tools.

In the Slavic world, broadly understood, cattle also had symbolic significance. Their skeletal parts were used as sacrificial offerings, for instance in the form of 'foundation deposits' (in Polish *ofiary zakładzinowe*; see Dalewski 1990; Kajkowski 2022). Extant written accounts pertaining to the Eastern Slavic area associate cattle with the god Weles, a deity linked to the underworld and magic (e.g. Szyjewski 2003; Łuczyński 2012). In fact, Weles is even referred to as 'cattle god.' Folkloristic accounts, on the other hand, suggest that there existed a belief concerning Slavic afterlife where human souls would transform into cattle and graze on an otherworldly meadow.

As with other Indo-European societies (Lincoln 1976), the theft of cattle or the diseases that befell these animals was a significant source of fear for the Slavic people. This fear and its dire consequences are vividly expressed in medieval stories and legends, particularly those concerning the terrible dragon believed to have lived in a cave beneath Wawel Hill in Kraków. Over the course of time, different variants of this story (in which cattle is sometimes substituted for sheep or virgins) were in circulation. The oldest account is preserved in *Historia Polonica*, the work of Wincenty Kadłubek dated to the twelfth/thirteenth centuries. Kadłubek explicitly says that the beast's 'voracity demanded a specific number of cattle each week, according to the count of days. If the inhabitants did not provide these offerings, they would be punished by the monster with the loss of an equal number of human lives (translated by Leszek Gardeła after Kürbis 2008, 13).

In discussing the importance of cattle in the Slavic world, one very important account has often been forgotten or overlooked. Put to parchment by an Arab writer named Al-Jāḥiẓ and preserved in a work known as *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* (*Book of Animals*; 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn 1966, 109, 110), this account has recently resurfaced thanks to the efforts of Davide Ermacora (2017) and his outstanding comparative research on 'the milk suckling-reptile'. The relevant passage from Al-Jāḥiẓ's work is worth presenting in full (cited after Ermacora 2017, 71):

> […] [a]ccording to what castrated and intact Slavs claim [a verb that indicates uncertainty is used] of the snake (*hayya*), in their countries it goes to the cow, it wraps itself around the hind legs [lit. 'thighs'] to the knees and hocks, then lifts its chest towards her udders with its mouth to reach the nipples. The cow cannot, despite her strength, move. [The snake] continues to suck the milk; whenever he sucks [the cow] becomes weaker. If she nears the point of death, it lets her go. They argue that the cow dies or suffers from a serious illness in the udder that makes it difficult to cure. The snake is greatly attracted to the milk. If the vipers find a container [of milk] without a cover, they dive to drink it and sometimes vomit what they have in their bowels: serious damage then affects those who drink this milk.

Dating from the ninth century, this account holds significant relevance in debates regarding Slavic pre-Christian worldviews. Despite being recorded in present-day Iraq, informants of Al-Jāḥiẓ explicitly stated that the belief in milk-suckling snakes was shared among the Slavs in their own countries. Therefore, it is highly probable that this belief was known in Central Europe, including Bohemia and Poland.

Returning to the temple rings with cattle heads and the *kaptorgas* with figural representations of entire cattle, it is tempting to read the imagery in light of Al-Jāḥiẓ's account. The details that support the idea that these artefacts reflect the myth of milk-suckling snakes are the aforementioned stripes/bands lying over the backs of the cattle (in the case of *kaptorgas*) and the twisted wires wound around the cattle heads (in the case of temple rings). *Kaptorgas* that lack the stripes/bands laid over the cattle backs carry other decorative motifs resembling snakes – as already noted above, these take the form of twisted wires situated behind or by the sides of the cattle. One of the most vivid examples of this iconographic variant is seen on the recently discovered *kaptorga* from Lille Karleby in Denmark (Fig. 4a).

Conclusions

This paper has sought to present a new reading of two groups of Western Slavic artefacts known from the area of present-day Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, and Denmark. By critically examining and integrating archaeological and textual sources, I have argued that temple rings and *kaptorgas* with figural representations of cattle and snakes may have alluded to a widespread pre-Christian belief concerning 'milk-suckling reptiles.' Different manifestations of this belief, as previously shown in the work of Davide Ermacora (2017), circulated in the ancient world and continued to linger in people's imagination well into the Middle Ages and the early modern period. In fact, in some places – for instance in northern Poland and the Baltic countries – they are remembered to this day. The fear of milk-suckling creatures was also present in Icelandic folklore, and vividly manifested by a creature called *tilberi*, which witches would allegedly send to suck milk from cows (e.g. Simpson 1972, 174).

The Viking Age Slavs who wore temple rings and *kaptorgas* presumably referencing the 'milk-suckling concept' were likely members of the social elite. The message they intended to convey was clear: As powerful individuals, they recognized the potential threats to their society but asserted their ability to manage and overcome these

challenges decisively. In essence, the message communicated through these objects was: 'everything is under control.'

Acknowledgements

The work leading to this publication is part of a project entitled *Slavs in the North: Foreign Elites in Viking Age Scandinavia* which is generously funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation. Special thanks are due to Ole Kastholm, Agnieszka Łukaszyk, Iwona Nowak, and Sławomir Wadyl for supplying high-quality photographs of Slavic artefacts from museum collections in Gdańsk, Łódź, Poznań, and Roskilde. Additional thanks are due to the curators at Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne in Warsaw for their kind permission to examine their collections in 2024.

Bibliography

'Abd al-Salām Hārūn, ed. 1966. *Kitab al-Hayawan.* Vol. IV: 'Isa al-Babi al-Halabi.

Álvarez-Pedrosa, Juan Antonio. 2021. *Sources of Slavic Pre-Christian Religion*. Brill.

Boháčová, Ivana, and Nad'a Profantová. 2014. "Bohemia and Great Moravia – Archaeological Evidence." In *Great Moravia and the Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by Pavel Kouřil, 143–54. The Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Brno.

Brather, Sebastian. 2008. *Archäologie der westlichen Slawen: Siedlung, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Ostmitteleuropa*. de Gruyter.

Brzeziński, Wojciech, ed. 2007. *Skarby wieków średnich: Katalog wystawy/Treasures of the Middle Ages: Catalogue of the Exhibition*. Państwowe Muzeum Archeologiczne.

Brzostowicz, Michał, and Agnieszka Stempin. 2009. *Tu powstała Polska* [Here Poland was born]. Muzeum Archeologiczne w Poznaniu.

Buko, Andrzej. 2008. *The Archaeology of Early Medieval Poland: Discoveries-Hypotheses-Interpretations*. Brill.

Bukowski, Zbigniew. 1960. *Puste kabłączki skroniowe typu pomorskiego* [Hollow temple rings of the Pomeranian type]. Muzeum Pomorza Zachodniego.

Dalewski, Z. 1990. "Zakładziny: obrzęd i mit: O słowiańskich zwyczajach i wierzeniach związanych z budową domu i zakładaniem miasta" [Foundation offerings: Ritual and myth: On Slavic customs and beliefs related to house building and city founding]. *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 44: 17–24.

Ermacora, Davide. 2017. "The Comparative Milk-Suckling Reptile." *Anthropozoologica* 52, no. 1: 59–81.

Frolíková-Kaliszová, Drahomíra. 2023. *Raně středověké pořhebiště Triangl v Praze-Střešovicích* [Early medieval cemetery Triangl in Prague-Střešovice]. Archeologický ústav Akademie věd České republiky.

Galuška, Ludék. 2014. "Rex, Principes, Optimates – The Elites of Great Moravia." In *Great Moravia and the Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by Pavel Kouřil, 54–65. The Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Brno.

Gardeła, Leszek. 2016. *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age*. Fassbaender.

———. 2017. *Bad Death in the Early Middle Ages: Atypical Burials from Poland in a Comparative Perspective*. Fundacja Rzeszowskiego Ośrodka Archeologicznego, Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego.

———. 2018. "Lutomiersk Unveiled: The Buried Warriors of Poland." *Medieval Warfare* 8, no. 3: 42–50.

———. 2020. "Uncoiling the Serpent: Snake Figurines in the Viking Age." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 16: 27–61.

———. 2021. "Miniature Swords in the Viking Age." *Acta Archaeologica* 92, no. 1: 24–51.

———. 2022a. "Miano bestii: Zachodniosłowiańska figurka 'konika' z duńskiej Wyspy Møn i jej analogie" [The name of the beast: A Western Slavic 'horse' figurine from the danish island of Møn and its analogies]. In *W świecie bogów, ludzi i zwierząt: Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Leszkowi Pawłowi Słupeckiemu* [*In the world of gods, people, and animals: Studies dedicated to Professor Leszek Paweł Słupecki*], edited by Michał Dzik, Remigiusz Gogosz, Jakub Morawiec, and Leszek Poniewozik, 357–84. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego.

———. 2022b. "Miniature Spears in the Viking Age: Small Symbols of Óðinn?" *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74: 397–430.

———. 2022c. "Miniatures with Nine Studs: Interdisciplinary Explorations of a New Type of Viking Age Artefact." *Fornvännen* 117: 15–36.

———. 2024a. *The Vikings in Poland*. Routledge.

———. 2024b. "Słowianie na Północy: Wyjście z cienia" [Slavs in the North: Emerging from the shadows]. *Archeologia Żywa* 3: 40–48.

———. In press-a. "Ledniccy loricati: Luksusowe elementy rzędu końskiego z Ostrowa Lednickiego i okolic" [The Loricati of Lednica: Luxurious riding gear from Ostrów Lednicki and its Vicinity]. *Studia Lednickie* 23: 137–87.

———. In press-b. "The Lost Art of the Piast State: A Preliminary Study of the Animal Style in Early Medieval Poland." In *Between East and West*, edited by Piotr Pranke. Brill.

———. In press-c. "Metal, bestie i elity: Zachodniosłowiański styl zwierzęcy u brzegów jeziora Lednica" [Metal, beasts, and the elite: The Western Slavic animal style on the shore of Lake Lednica]. *Studia Lednickie* 23: 65–135.

———. In press-d. "Slavic Paganism in Viking Age Denmark: Neglected Evidence and New Archaeological Perspectives." In *Interdisciplinary Viking Symposium*, edited by Sarah Croix, Simon Nygaard, and Søren Michael Sindbæk. Aarhus University Press.

———. In press-e. "Wonders from Beyond: 'Bird's Feet Pendant' from a Grave of a Viking Age Ritual Specialist at Fyrkat, Denmark." In *Between Bones and Beliefs: Human-Bird Relations in Central and Northern Europe in the 1st Millennium AD*, edited by Klaudia Karpińska, Sigmund Oehrl, and Rebecca Smallman. Turnhout.

Gardeła, Leszek, Sophie Bønding, and Peter Pentz, eds. 2023. *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*. Oxbow Books.

Gardeła, Leszek, and Kamil Kajkowski. 2021. "Slavs and Snakes: Material Markers of Elite Identity in Viking Age Poland." *European Journal of Archaeology* 24, no. 1: 108–30.

———, eds. 2023a. *Animals and Animated Objects in the Early Middle Ages*. Brepols.

———. 2023b. "Riders on the Storm: Decorative Horse Bridles in the Early Piast State and Pomerania." In *Animals and Animated Objects in the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Leszek Gardeła and Kamil Kajkowski, 159–92. Brepols.

Gardeła, Leszek, Kamil Kajkowski, and Zdzisława Ratajczyk. 2019. "Ostrogi zoomorficzne z Ciepłego: Zachodniosłowiański model kosmosu?" [Zoomorphic spurs from Ciepłe: A Western Slavic model of the cosmos?] *Pomorania Antiqua* 28: 65–152.

Gardeła, Leszek, Peter Pentz, and Neil Price. 2022. "Revisiting the 'Valkyries:' Armed Females in Viking-Age Figurative Metalwork." *Current Swedish Archaeology* 30: 95–151.

Horoszko, Genowefa, Jerzy Piniński, Peter Illisch, et al. 2016. *Frühmittelalterliche Münzfunde aus Polen Inventar II – Pommern*. Institut für Archäologie und Ethnologie der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Numismatische Kommission der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

Jelińska, Elżbieta, ed. 2013. *Średniowieczne skarby srebrne z Pojezierza Iławskiego w zbiorach Muzeum Warmii i Mazur* [Medieval silver hoards from the Iława Lake District in the collections of the Museum of Warmia and Masuria]. Muzeum Warmii i Mazur.

Jennbert, Kristina. 2011. *Animals and Humans: Recurrent Symbiosis in Archaeology and Old Norse Religion*. Nordic Academic Press.

Jensen, Bo. 2023. "Den böhmiske princesse" [The Bohemian princess]. *Skalk* 2023, no. 3: 14–17.

Jessen, Mads Dengsø. 2023. "Miniature Chairs: On Seeresses, the Future, and Conflict." In *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*, edited by Leszek Gardeła, Sophie Bønding, and Peter Pentz, 451–62. Oxbow Books.

Kajkowski, Kamil. 2019. *Obrzędowość religijna Pomorzan we wczesnym średniowieczu. Studium archeologiczne* [Religious rituals of the Pomeranians in the Early Middle Ages: An archaeological study]. Chronicon.

———. 2022. "Ofiara zakładzinowa w świecie wczesnośredniowiecznych wyobrażeń zachodniosłowiańskich (na przykładzie odkryć z ziem polskich)" [Foundation sacrifice in the world of early medieval West Slavic beliefs (Based on discoveries from Polish lands)]. In *W świecie bogów, ludzi i zwierząt. Studia ofiarowane Profesorowi Leszkowi Pawłowi Słupeckiemu*, edited by Michał Dzik, Remigiusz Gogosz, Jakub Morawiec and Leszek Poniewozik, 407–33. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego.

———. 2024. "Bydło w wyobrażeniach eschatologicznych wczesnośredniowiecznych Słowian zachodnich: Kontekst nekropoliczny" [Cattle in eschatological beliefs of early medieval Western Slavs: funerary context]. In *Prawy dba o duszę swego zwierzęcia*

domowego. Pochówki ludzi i zwierząt [*The righteous cares for the soul of his domestic animal: human and animal burials*], edited by Mateusz Jaeger, Jacek Tomczyk, and Jacek Wrzesiński, 85–96. Instytut Kultury Europejskiej w Gnieźnie.

Kastholm, Ole Thirup, and Ashot Margaryan. 2021. "Reconstructing the Gerdrup Grave – the Story of an Unusual Viking Age Double Grave in Context and in the Light of New Analysis." *Danish Journal of Archaeology* 10: 1–20.

Kastholm, Ole Thirup, Julie Nielsen, and Bo Jensen. 2017. "Vikingetidsskatten fra Lille Karleby" [The Viking Age treasure from Lille Karleby]. *Romu: årsskrift fra Roskilde Museum* 2017: 54–73.

Kawiński, Paweł, and Seweryn Szczepański. 2016. *Szkice o religii Prusów* [Notes on the religion of the Prussians]. Oficyna Wydawnicza Pruthenia.

Klæsøe, Iben Skibsted, Jeppe Boel Jepsen, Freddy Arntsen, et al., eds. 2020. *Glimt fra vikingetiden* [A glimpse from the Viking Age]. Danske Amatørarkæologer.

Kouřil, Pavel, ed. 2014. *Great Moravia and the Beginnings of Christianity*. The Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Brno.

Kóčka-Krenz, Hanna. 1993. *Biżuteria północno-zachodnio-słowiańska we wczesnym średniowieczu* [Northwest Slavic jewellery in the early Middle Ages]. Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu.

Kürbis, Brygida, ed. 2008. *Mistrz Wincenty (tzw. Kadłubek): Kronika polska* [Master Vincent (so-called Kadłubek): The Polish Chronicle]. Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

Lincoln, Bruce. 1976. "The Indo-European Cattle-Raiding Myth." *History of Religions* 16, no. 1: 42–65.

Łuczyński, Michał. 2012. "Kognitywna definicja Welesa~Wołosa: Etnolingwistyczna próba rekonstrukcji fragmentu słowiańskiego tradycyjnego mitologicznego obrazu świata" [Cognitive definition of Weles~Wołos: An ethnololinguistic attempt to reconstruct a fragment of the traditional Slavic mythological worldview]. *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 15: 169–78.

———. 2022. *Mity Słowian: Śladami świętych opowieści przodków* [Slavic myths: Tracing the sacred stories of the ancestors]. Wszechnica Triglava IV. Wydawnictwo Triglav.

Macháček, Jiří, Stefan Eichert, Vojtěch Nosek, and Ernst Pernicka. 2024. "Copper-alloy Belt Fittings and Elite Networking in Early Medieval Central Europe." *Journal of Archaeological Science* 161: 1–13.

Morawiec, Jakub. 2009. *Vikings Among the Slavs. Jomsborg and the Jomsvikings in Old Norse Tradition*. Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia 17. Fassbaender.

Musianowicz, Krystyna. 1948–1949. "Kabłączki skroniowe: próba typologii i chronologii" [Temple rings: An attempt at typology and chronology]. *Światowit* 20: 115–232.

Naum, Magdalena. 2008. *Homelands Lost and Gained: Slavic Migration and Settlement on Bornholm in the Early Middle Ages*. Lunds Universitet.

Pentz, Peter. 2018. "Viking Art, Snorri Sturluson and Recent Metal Detector Finds." *Fornvännen* 113: 17–33.

———. 2023. "New Finds from the Shamanic Battlefield." *Fornvännen* 118, no. 1: 57–64.

Petersen, Vang Peter. 2023. "Wheels for Freyja's Chariot? Wheel-shaped Pendants from the Viking Age." In *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*, edited by Leszek Gardeła, Sophie Bønding and Peter Pentz, 463–78. Oxbow Books.

Pieta, Karol. 2014. "Bojná." In *Great Moravia and the Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by Pavel Kouřil, 239–42. The Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Brno.

Posselt, Normen, and Paweł Szczepanik. 2017. "Zoomorphe Applikationen und Darstellungen auf slawischen Schläfenringen im nördlichen westslawischen Raum." In *Religion und Gesellschaft im nördlichen westslawischen Raum*, edited by Felix Biermann, Thomas Kersting and Anne Klammt, 193–220. Archäologische Fachliteratur. Beier & Beran.

Price, Neil. 2002. *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University.

Profantová, Nad'a, and Alena Šilhová. 2010. "Raně středověké kaptorgy v Čechách: Analýza nálezu z hrobu č. 22 na pohřebišti Klecany II" [Early medieval kaptorgas in Bohemia: Analysis of a find from grave no. 22 at the Klecany II cemetery]. *Památky Archeologické* 101: 283–310.

Profantová, Nad'a, and David Daněček. 2017. "Nová stříbrná kaptorga ze středních Čech v souvislosti s konkrétním výrobním okruhem(?) v Praze" [A new silver kaptorga from Central Bohemia and its connection with a specific production circle(?) in Prague]. *Slavia Antiqua* 57: 91–113.

Rosik, Stanisław. 2023. *Od Swarożyca do Świętowita. Przemiany religii Słowian nadbałtyckich w X–XII wieku* [From Swarożyc to Świętowit: Transformations of the religion of the Baltic Slavs in the 10th–12th centuries]. Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk.

Roslund, Mats. 2007. *Guests in the House: Cultural Transmission between Slavs and Scandinavians 900 to 1300 AD*. Brill.

Simpson, Jacqueline. 1972. *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*. University of California Press.

Szczepanik, Paweł. 2017. "Early Medieval Bronze Sheaths with Zoo- and Anthropomorphic Ornamental Fittings from Poland – Mythical Pictures and their Content." In *Religion und Gesellschaft im nördlichen westslawischen Raum*, edited by Felix Biermann, Thomas Kersting, and Anne Klammt, 169–78. Archäologische Fachliteratur. Beier & Beran.

———. 2018. *Słowiańskie zaświaty. Wierzenia, wizje i mity* [Slavic afterlife: Beliefs, visions, and myths]. Wszechnica Triglava II. Wydawnictwo Triglav.

———. 2020. *Rzeczywistość mityczna Słowian północno-zachodnich i jej materialne wyobrażenia: Studium z zakresu etnoarcheologii religii* [Mythical reality of the Northwest Slavs and its material representations: A study in the ethnoarchaeology of religion]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.

Szczurek, Tadeusz, Borys Paszkiewicz, Arkadiusz Tabaka, et al. 2017. *Frühmittelalterliche Münzfunde aus Polen Inventar I – Grosspolen*. Institut für Archäologie und Ethnologie der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Numismatische Kommission der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

Sztyber, Agata. 2010. "Funkcja i znaczenie kaptorg we wczesnym średniowieczu" [Function and meaning of Kaptorgas in the early Middle Ages]. In *Kultura materialna średniowiecza w Polsce: Życie codzienne przez pryzmat rzeczy* [*Material culture of the Middle Ages in Poland: Daily life as seen through objects*], edited by Paweł Kucypera and Sławomir Wadyl, 43–62. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.

Szyjewski, Andrzej. 2003. *Religia Słowian* [Slavic religion]. Wydawnictwo WAM.

Ulriksen, Jens. 2011. "Spor af begravelsesritualer i jordfæstegrave i vikingetidens Danmark" [Traces of burial rituals in graves in Viking Age Denmark]. *KUML* 2011: 161–245.

Urbańczyk, Przemysław. 2012. *Mieszko Pierwszy Tajemniczy* [Mieszko I the Mysterious]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.

———. 2017. *Bolesław Chrobry – lew ryczący* [Bolesław the Brave – The roaring lion]. Fundacja na rzecz Nauki Polskiej.

Wicker, Nancy. 2020. "Humans and Animals: The Changing Corpus of Danish Viking Art." In *Viking Encounters: Proceedings of the 18th Viking Congress*, edited by Anne Pedersen and Søren Michael Sindbæk, 413–25. Aarhus University Press.

Williams, Howard. 2016a. "Citations in Stone: The Material World of Hogbacks." *European Journal of Archaeology* 19, no. 3: 497–518.

———. 2016b. "Viking Mortuary Citations." *European Journal of Archaeology* 19, no. 3: 400–14.

Zawol, Magdalena. 2018. "Motywy dekoracyjne kaptorg trapezowatych z terenów ziem polskich – próba interpretacji" [Decorative motifs of trapezoidal kaptorgas from Polish lands – An attempt at interpretation]. In *Inspiracje i funkcje sztuki pradziejowej i wczesnośredniowiecznej* [*Inspirations and functions of prehistoric and early medieval art*], edited by Bogusław Gediga, Anna Grossman and Wojciech Piotrowski, 467–90. Muzeum Archeologiczne w Biskupinie/Polska Akademia Nauk – Oddział we Wrocławiu/Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk.

Żak, Jan. 1959. "Uwagi o stylu zwierzęcym w sztuce wczesnośredniowiecznej na ziemiach polskich" [Remarks on the animal style in early medieval art in Poland]. *Archeologia Polski* 4, no. 1: 7–27.

FROM ARTEFACTS TO RITUAL DRAMA: REVISITING KÄRING(A)SJÖN IN HALLAND

Anders Andrén*

In the summer of 1941, Holger Arbman, with his assistants Erik Floderus and Maj Odelberg, together with conscripts, investigated part of Käringsjö Mosse (the bog of Old Woman's Lake) in southern Halland, in present-day southern Sweden. Arbman knew about the site because small-scale excavations had been carried out in the bog in 1917–18. These excavations had been started because cut wood and pottery had been found during digging for peat. Already in the unpublished reports of the early excavations, Käringsjö Mosse was interpreted as a ritual site (Arbman 1945, 7–15).

According to oral traditions at the Department of Archaeology in Lund, where Holger Arbman (1904–68) later became professor, he was very disappointed by the results of the excavation at Käringsjö Mosse. He had hoped to find a counterpart to the spectacular Danish war booties, such as Thorsbjerg and Vismose.[1] Instead, he found something much more modest and mundane, but something that was important in its own right. Although Arbman was disappointed, he actually presented the investigations in a very thorough publication just four years after the excavations (Arbman 1945).

Käringsjö Mosse

Käringsjö Mosse is situated about two kilometres west of the river Nissan in the parish of Övraby in southern Halland. The ruins of the former parish church of Övraby are located about four kilometres south-west of Käringsjö Mosse. Övraby is the site of the medieval royal manor of Halmstad, which in the middle of the thirteenth century developed into a small town. In 1322, the town of Halmstad was purposely moved

* Professor emeritus of Archaeology, Stockholm University.

[1] I was told this oral tradition in the 1980s by Arbman's former student Claes Wahlöö (1939–2019), who was city antiquarian in Lund.

further south, closer to the mouth of the river Nissan, and the site of the former town and royal manor was renamed Övraby ('the village higher up') (Augustsson 1980, 6–50).

Käringsjö Mosse is located in a natural depression of a moraine ridge. As the name indicates, the bog was previously a small lake, about 55 metres in diameter. In the south, the former lake is about 25 metres below the top of the ridge and in the north about nine metres below the ridge. Towards the north-east, there is a passage through the ridge, which must have been the inlet to the former lake. Between the former lake and the passage, there is a small flat area (Fig. 1).

The excavations in 1941 took place along the shorelines of the former lake. In the trenches, simple platforms of stones, wooden shafts and small branches were found. Some of the shafts were trees that were felled on site to clear the shorelines.

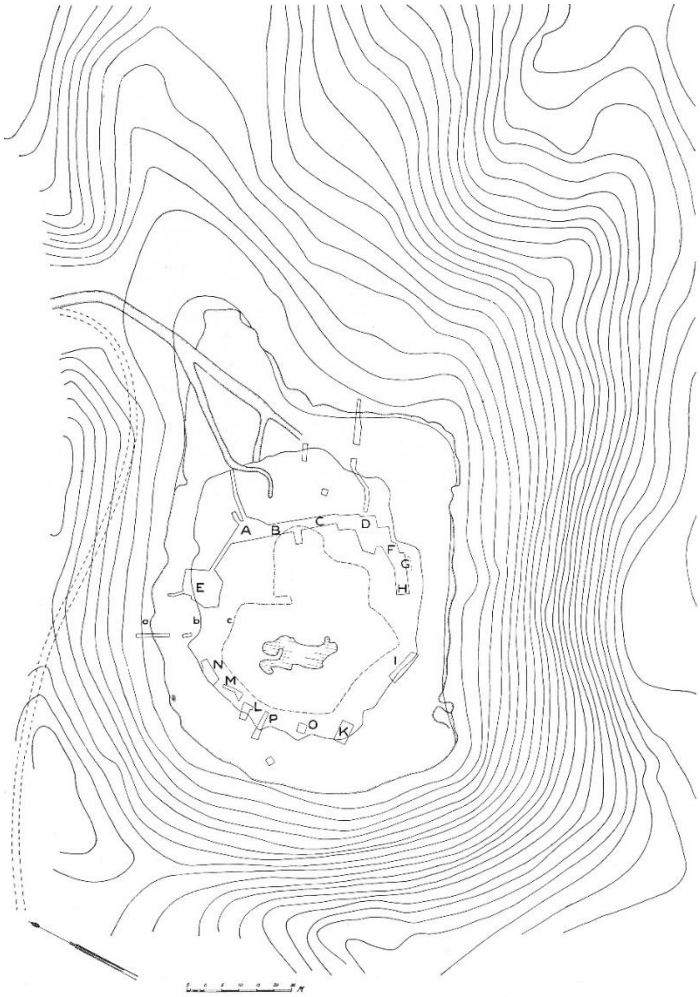


Figure 1. Käringsjön in its topographical setting, with the archaeological trenches marked out by letters from A to P. Note that north is to the left (after Arbman 1945, 11).

In and around the platforms there were finds of pottery, wooden objects, ropes, bundles of flax and many small white stones (Arbman 1945, 15–41). About 100 ceramic vessels were found, most of them large coarse utility pottery, used for storage and cooking. These vessels are difficult to date. Apart from the large utility vessels, however, fine-ware decorated pottery was found, such as small bowls and cups for drinking. From parallels in graves, these vessels can be dated to the third and fourth centuries CE. Most of the pottery was placed as whole vessels in the former lake, whereas some were broken into pieces and deposited as sherds. A few of the utility vessels had holes in the bottom, but in three cases a sherd from another vessel or a flat piece of granite had been placed over the hole. Burnt crust on the inside of many utility vessels indicates that a kind of porridge of cereals and blood was cooked in the large pots. Moreover, chemical analyses also indicate that some vessels had contained animal fat, probably from intestines (Arbman 1945, 42–83).

The wooden objects consisted primarily of tools, such as a spade, a digging stick, a club for threshing or pounding flax, two rake-heads, a pully for a sheep or goat tether, a flax holder, a large trough and possibly a cooking board. Apart from the tools, a geometrically decorated casket lid, a small casket and a turned box were also found. Some charred branches of wood were also found on the platform. In some places of the former lake bundles of flax and ropes of lime-bast were discovered as well. And everywhere in the trenches, small white stones of quartz and quartzite were also found, which probably had been thrown into the lake. Besides, in the open lake, two stones were bound with bast ropes, for use as sinkers (Arbman 1945, 84–98).

By comparing the finds with similar Danish bog finds, Arbman concluded that Käringsjön was a sacred place of an ordinary peasant population, where they offered sacrifices to the gods, praying for good harvests and protection of livestock. He even speculated that the name Käringsjön had something to do with the Nerthus cult, although he found this interpretation somewhat too imaginative (Arbman 1945, 99–110, cf. 15).

Later Investigations

Due to Arbman's thorough publication, Käringsjön became an iconic sacred place connected with fertility rituals from the Iron Age in Scandinavian archaeology. The site, however, was not restudied until Anne Carlie and colleagues returned to Käringsjön some 60 years later, to gain further knowledge of the site (Carlie 1998; 2007; Björkman 2007; Stilborg 2007).

Carlie made a new spatial analysis of the objects found on the platforms. Most of the objects were found on the eastern shores, while much fewer were discovered on the western side. Drinking cups found to the east could primarily be dated to the third century, whereas drinking cups from the fourth century above all were found to the west (Carlie 1998, 26). Carlie emphasised that most of the objects, as well as the content of the vessels, indicated autumn activities in traditional farming culture, such as harvesting, flax processing, and slaughter. She even tried to combine the find spots

along the eastern and western shores with the rising and setting sun (Carlie 1998, 29–31).

In addition, Carlie was able to confirm Arbman's assumption that hearths existed around the former lake. In one trench on the small platform east of the lake, she found a large hearth, dated by carbon 14 to about 110±60 CE (Carlie 2007, 237–40). Furthermore, she expanded the interpretations of some of Arbman's observations. She interpreted the charred branches as torches used in rituals that took place in darkness. And the holes in the large utility vessels she regarded as devices to give an illusion that the content of the pots was slowly consumed by the powers in the lake. By comparing Käringsjön with other ritual places than those considered by Arbman, Carlie was also able to demonstrate that all types of finds from the site occurred in different ritual contexts in the Iron Age, even the wooden tools (Carlie 1998, 21–25; 2007, 252–58).

Carlie and her colleagues also analysed the local and regional setting of Käringsjön, from ancient monuments, pollen analysis (Björkman 2007) and ceramic studies (Stilborg 2007). Käringsjön was located in a densely settled region, dominated by agriculture and grazing. The pottery was mainly produced locally, but some vessels had a broader regional character, and a few may even have been imported from further away. Although many of the objects discovered were local, she maintains that a community larger than the nearest settlements could have been behind the sacred site (Carlie 2007, 240–48).

When the rituals stopped at Käringsjön around 400 CE they could have moved only a short distance. Carlie points out that Käringsjön in historical times was located in the outlands of the village of Älvasjö. The village is mentioned for the first time as Elfveplet (1595) and Eluisöe (1602). She maintains that the village is named after a small, now dried-out, lake in the village, and that the name refers to the mythological powers of *álfar* or elves. According to Carlie, however, the name Käringsjön refers to a female deity, and the Nerthus cult can be regarded as an analogy. Consequently, Carlie views the relocation of rituals as a redefinition of the ritual context as well (Carlie 1998, 31–35; Näsström 2007).

Additional Perspectives

Arbman's publication and Carlie's later studies are all important in understanding Käringsjön as a ritual place. Further aspects, however, can still be added. The rituals in Käringsjön are dated to about 200–400 CE, with the help of some drinking vessels. The Carbon 14 dating of the hearth to about 110±60 CE indicates that the rituals started earlier, possibly around 100 CE. In that case, only utility vessels were used in the beginning, which is quite plausible because these pots are difficult to date.

Carlie's attempt to date the rituals to different seasons is less convincing, for several reasons. The concentration of objects on the eastern shore could be a result of preservation conditions. Arbman underlines that the ritual remains at Käringsjön were heavily destroyed by peat extraction (Arbman 1945, 17), which means that it is difficult to evaluate concentrations of finds. Besides, if the concentration of objects along the

eastern shore actually reflects a reality in the past, it is still hard to relate it to sunrise or sunset, making it difficult to determine seasons. Still, as Carlie emphasises, the objects themselves and their content point primarily to activities in the autumn.

The importance of gender in rituals is mentioned by Carlie (2007, 248–52), but she does not go any further with this perspective. In fact, most objects and traces of activities found in Käringsjön can be connected to a female domain in traditional agrarian cultures, such as raking hay and straw, processing flax, taking care of goats and sheep, making pottery and cooking food. Consequently, many of the rituals at Käringsjön could have been carried out or supervised by women, although men could have participated as well.

The lake is always referred to as Käringsjön ('Old Woman's Lake'), although Arbman mentions that it was also called Käringasjön (Arbman 1945, 9). This other form is probably older because it is used on a map from 1776 (*Kierringasjö*). Interestingly enough, the inserted *a* is probably the genitive plural,[2] which means that Käringasjön should be interpreted as 'Old Women's Lake.' Consequently, the name could not have referred to a single female deity, such as Nerthus, but can be regarded in two other possible contexts.

If the name referred to ritual activities at the lake, it underlines that the rituals were carried out or supervised by women, as many of the sacrificed objects indicate. In that case, the name says nothing about the powers of the lake. Instead, the proximity of Käringasjön to the village and lake of Älvasjö could indicate that the content of the rituals remained largely unchanged even though the rituals were relocated. This opens up the possibility that the finds at Käringasjön reflect an early form of *álfablót* or 'sacrifice to the elves.' The *álfar* or 'elves' represented a male collective of fertility and protective powers, sometimes connected in uncertain ways to the *vanir*. Sacrifices to the *álfar* are mentioned a few times, and the well-known *álfablót* is described in the poem *Austrfaravísur* (c. 1019), attributed to Sigvatr Þorðason (Gunnell 2020). According to the poem, Sigvatr crossed the Eið forest in the late autumn and possibly came to Värmland or Västergötland. In the evening, he arrived at a farm called Hof, looking for lodging for the night, but was denied entry to the farmhouse. A woman told him he could not enter the house because "they were holding a sacrifice to the elves inside her farmhouse." Men are also mentioned by Sigvatr, but they do not seem to have a leading role (Fulk 2012; cf. Gunnell 2020). Rituals connected to women in the autumn in the evening darkness are similar traits in Käringasjön and *Austrfaravísur*, whereas a different aspect is indoor rituals in the latter text. This could be due to regional differences or more likely to change over time, over more than half a millennium. In any case, the comparisons between *Austrfaravísur* and Käringsjön can open up a new ritual context (Andrén 1998, 145–77).

Another possibility, however, is that the name Käringasjön ('Old Women's Lake') referred to a collective of female powers of the lake, rather than the rituals carried out by women on the shores of the lake. In that case, the powers of the lake could have been the *dísir*. We know very little about the *dísir*, but there seems to have been a connection to the *vanir* goddess Freyja, indicating female powers of fertility and protection. A few

[2] Personal communication from Stefan Brink.

times rituals directed towards them are mentioned, such as *dísablót* ('sacrifice to the *dísir*'), and a few sacral place names are known, such as Disevi in Östergötland (Lindow 2020).

It may also be that the powers of Käringasjön resembled the contemporary Romanised versions of the *dísir* more closely, such as the *matronae* ('venerable ladies') or the *matres* ('mothers'). Votive altars to *matronae* and *matres* were erected from the first to the fourth century CE, primarily in the Rhineland. The *matronae* and the *matres* were depicted as three women, two married and one unmarried, holding fruits, nuts, cereals, water-carrying vessels, branches of trees, and occasional piglets. Their names refer to places, rivers, tribes, luck and healing. From the images and the names, it is clear that the *matronae* and *matres* were linked to protection and fertility (Simek 2020). It is interesting that the *matronae* and the *matres* primarily were connected to plants, drinks and water, just as the finds in Käringasjön. Consequently, comparisons with the cults of *matronae* and *matres* may renew the interpretations of the rituals at Käringasjön as well. Still, we will never know definitively the name of the powers of Käringasjön, although they must have been connected to fertility and protection in some ways.

From Artefacts to Ritual Drama

Archaeologists always investigate places *post festum*, or as Gavin Lucas frames it, archaeology is "haunted by absences" (Lucas 2012, 178–88). Even so, it is possible to infer some action from the traces of the past. In this case, it is possible to at least outline a ritual drama (Gunnell 1995; 2016) at Käringasjön some 1700 years ago. To make such an outline more visual, I have combined Arbman's and Carlie's investigations in one more schematic plan (Fig. 2).

We can imagine a group of people from the local agrarian community walking in the autumn evening through fields and meadows to the secluded small lake situated in a hollow in the moraine ridge. They are headed by some old women, and most of the participants, if not all, are women. On the shore of the lake, they light fires and cook a porridge of cereals and blood and add intestines in some pots. Then they bring the pots of porridge and some cups with ale and mead to the platforms around the lake. In the light of the torches, they place the pots on the platforms and add a few wooden tools or bundles of flax, maybe while singing or reciting poems or even dancing, to communicate with the powers of the lake. In addition, they throw small pieces of quartz onto the platform and into the lake, and the white stones glimmer in the light of the torches. For a while they watch the pots, to see when the porridge starts to sink, which means that the powers of the lake, such as *álfar* or *dísir*, begin to eat, and consequently have accepted their gifts. After watching the porridge sinking in the pots, the people withdraw from the lake and sit in the light of the fires to eat some of the porridge and drink some of the ale or mead. Finally, they walk home in the autumn night, confident that the powers of the lake will protect them and promote their harvests and livestock.

Figure 2. Schematic plan of the investigations at Käringsjön in 1941 and in 2000–2001.
The plan is based on Arbman 1945, plates I–V and Carlie 1998, 26; 2007, 229 and 236.
dashed line = the approximate shoreline of the former lake
grey area = platform built of wood and stone at the shoreline
blue area = hearth
red dot = ceramic vessel
green triangle = wooden object
yellow diamond = rope of lime-bast or bundle of flax

Bibliography

Andrén, Anders. 1998. *Between Artifacts and Texts: Historical Archaeology in Global Perspective.* Plenum Press.

Arbman, Holger. 1945. *Käringsjön: Studier i halländsk järnålder* [Käringsjön: Studies on Halland's Iron Age]. Wahlström & Widstrand.

Augustsson, Jan-Erik. 1980. *Halmstad*. Medeltidsstaden 20. Riksantikvarieämbetet och Statens Historiska Museum.

Björkman, Leif. 2007. "Vegetationsutveckling och markanvändning vid Käringsjön i Halland från neolitikum till tidig medeltid" [Vegetation development and land use in Halland from the Neolithic to the early Middle Ages]. In *Järnålderns rituella platser: Femton artiklar om kultutövning och religion från en konferens i Nissaström den 4–5 oktober 2007* [Iron Age ritual sites: Fifteen articles on cult practice and religion from a

conference in Nissaström on 4–5 October 2007], edited by Anne Carlie, 183–208. Utskrift 9. Stiftelsen Hallands länsmuseer, Kulturmiljö Halland.

Carlie, Anne. 1998. "Käringsjön: A Fertility Sacrificial Site from the Late Roman Iron Age in South-West Sweden." *Current Swedish Archaeology* 6: 17–37.

———. 2007. "Käringsjön – en gammal fyndplats i ny belysning" [Käringsjön – an old site in a new light]. In *Järnålderns rituella platser: Femton artiklar om kultutövning och religion från en konferens i Nissaström den 4–5 oktober 2007*, edited by Anne Carlie, 225–263. Utskrift 9. Stiftelsen Hallands länsmuseer, Kulturmiljö Halland.

Fulk, R. D. 2012. "Sigvatr Þorðason. *Austrfaravísur*." In *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, edited by Diana Whaley, 578–80. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1. Brepols.

Gunnell, Terry. 1995. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Brewer.

———. 2016. "Eddic Performance and Eddic Audiences." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, 92–113. Cambridge University Press.

———. 2020. "Álfar (Elves)." In *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures. Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings*, edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén, 1571–80. Brepols.

Lindow, John. 2020. "Dísir." In *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures. Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings*, edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén, 1493–1500. Brepols.

Lucas, Gavin. 2012. *Understanding the Archaeological Record*. Cambridge University Press.

Näsström, Britt-Mari. 2007. "Vem var Nerthus? Spåren av en gudinna" [Who was Nerthus? Tracks of a goddess]. In *Järnålderns rituella platser: Femton artiklar om kultutövning och religion från en konferens i Nissaström den 4–5 oktober 2007*, edited by Anne Carlie, 265–80. Utskrift 9. Stiftelsen Hallands länsmuseer, Kulturmiljö Halland.

Simek, Rudolf. 2020. "Matronae." In *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures. Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings*, edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén, 1481–91. Brepols.

Stilborg, Ole. 2007. "Vid vatten, sten och jord: studier av keramikoffer vid Käringsjön och andra lokaliteter i Halland och Östergötland" [By water, stone and earth: Studies on pottery offerings at Käringsjön and other places in Halland and Östergötland]. In *Järnålderns rituella platser: Femton artiklar om kultutövning och religion från en konferens i Nissaström den 4–5 oktober 2007*, edited by Anne Carlie, 139–79. Utskrift 9. Stiftelsen Hallands länsmuseer, Kulturmiljö Halland.

RUNIC POETRY AS ORAL POETRY: SOME FORMULAE FROM THE VIKING AGE

Simon Nygaard*

Few scholars, if any at all, have done more for the advancement of the study of performance, poetry, and orality in the Old Norse world than Terry Gunnell. His scholarship, both when it is encountered on paper and in person, continues to bring inspiration to scholars including myself, and had it not been for Terry's willingness to discuss and engage with the work of students at all levels, I would not be where I am today. For that, I thank you, Terry! In the present chapter, I will investigate one of the few types of Old Norse (oral) poetry which Terry has not worked with: Viking-Age runic poetry. One of the main concerns of this contribution will be how to better explain some of the issues that arise from treating Viking-Age runic poetry as *literature* by arguing that runic poetry should rather be seen as a form of *oral poetry*. Three types of oral formulae in runic poetry will be analysed and it will be argued that the formulae create culturally specific, idiomatic meaning centred on various aspects of Old Norse hegemonic masculinity.

Like Old Norse poetry in general, runic poetry can be connected to the larger Germanic poetic tradition. Runic poetry is found from *c.* 400–1300 CE (Naumann 2018, 119) spread across Scandinavia, the North Atlantic Isles, and Greenland. Where runic poetry differs from, for instance, much Old Norse Eddic poetry is with regard to length. While much other Old Norse poetry in general is stanzaic and often (apart from the many *lausavísur*) of considerable length, runic poetry often consists of the smallest metrical units possible, that is, the so-called Germanic *long-line* (Sievers 1893; cf. Brate and Bugge 1891; Marold 2012). Briefly sketched out, Sievers' understanding of metricity rests on the rhythm thought to be present in groups of words. This rhythm is made up

* Aarhus University, School of Culture and Society, Department of the Study of Religion/Uppsala University, Department of Scandinavian Languages. I thank Judith Jesch for comments on a draft of this chapter. Any shortcomings are my own. This research was supported by the Independent Research Fund Denmark (grant no. 0162-00048B).

of one stressed and one or more unstressed syllables following certain patterns (called *feet*) and combined in pairs to make up a *half-line* (Marold 2012, 64–68). The long-line comprises two half-lines separated by a metrical break (or *caesura*) and connected by *alliteration*. In the following, a runic poem is understood to be present when one long-line can be identified in a given inscription.[1]

I will investigate a small selection of the *c*. 200 known runic poems from the late Viking Age (Wulf 2003, 969; SkP Run), focussing on inscriptions from Denmark including Skåne (DR[2]) and the Swedish regions of Småland (Sm), Östergötland (Ög), Södermanland (Sö), and Uppland (U). The inscriptions under scrutiny here are all linguistically, stylistically, and rune-typologically dated to 970–1020 CE and follow the common pattern for Viking-Age memorial inscriptions (cf. Palm 1992). This period of time was one of many cultural changes. Eight out of the eleven examples across all proposed categories can be connected to early Christianity due mainly to the presence of crosses as ornamentation This points to a cultural continuity from pre-Christian times which is explored towards the end of the chapter. The inscriptions treated here are all found on rune stones and all stones are raised for men. The runic poems all include markedly similar poetic expressions, which I will view as being *oral formulae* (see below). When the similarities between the inscriptions which will be treated in this chapter have been noted in the past, it has often been stated that one poetic expression must be borrowed or quoted from the other in a very literary fashion (e.g., Naumann 2018, 76, 89; Wulf 2003, 973–74). While it seems that there, in some of the previous research, existed an idea about formulae being poetic, sometimes even oral, shared knowledge (e.g., Jansson 1964, 234), the consequences of this oral provenance are not realised in the analyses of the respective authors. The literary understanding of the nature of runic inscriptions and, in the case of runic poetry especially, the notion of authorship and fixed, composed poetry are still emphasised to an inexpedient degree (see, for instance, Wulf 2003, 977; Naumann 2018, 132). This especially seems to be the case when we move beyond one or two long-lines into stanzaic territory or when stones appear close together geographically.[3]

The stones that will be treated in this chapter are known as Sjörup (DR 279) and Hällestad 1 (DR 295) containing the formula *Saʀ flo ægi / at Upsalum*; Ryssby kyrka (Sm

[1] For want of space, detailed metrical analyses will not be included, but the reader is referred to works on runic poetry by, for instance, Brate and Bugge (1891) and Marold (2012), who base their work on Sieversian metrical understandings. See also Jesch (2017), Naumann (2018), and Wulf (2003). A working corpus of runic poetry is outlined in the database of the *Runic Poetry*-volume in the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (SkP Run). It should be noted that some scholars, like Frank Hübler (1996), have been reluctant to accept a single long-line as poetry.

[2] The signa used refer to the numbering in the national runic corpus editions, *Danmarks runeindskrifter* (DR) for Denmark, incl. Skåne, and *Sveriges runinskrifter* (SRI) for Sweden.

[3] An exception is part of Evert Salberger's article (1990) on the Sigtuna whetstone-forgery (cf. Gustavson 2012). The last few pages of this article wrestle with much the same problem of literary quotes at the base of the present chapter. While Salberger (1990, 175–77) uses, for instance, the inscriptions with the formula "*Hann vaʀ manna / mæstr ōnīðingʀ*" in an attempt to explain his interpretation of what turned out to be a fake inscription, his thoughts on the explanatory potential of an oral culture rather than the notion literary quotes and borrowings are refreshing.

39), Hagstugan (Sö 130), Ivla (Sm 44), Västra Väppeby (U 703), and Gådi (U 739) containing variations of the *mildan orða* / *ok mataʀ gōðan* formula; and Aarhus 5 (DR 68), Transjö (Sm 5), Rörbro (Sm 37), and Hovgården (Ög 77) on which we find the *Saʀ do manna* / *mest uniðingʀ* formula. These are the only known instances of these particular formulae in runic inscriptions. A wealth of other formulae exist in the runestone corpus,[4] but they will not be treated further here. The examples here are chosen because they are illustrative of how oral formulae function: by creating culturally specific, idiomatic meaning.

Runic inscriptions present a fascinating case of the interplay between orality and literacy (cf. Jesch 1998; 2001, 9–11; Harris 2008) representing a system of writing used in a very specialised fashion by, presumably, a limited part of society – at least in the late Viking Age (Imer 2021, 46–47). However, because the culture in which the runic inscriptions were produced, and thus also where the runic poems in question were composed, was predominantly oral, I will view these runic poems as essentially *oral poems* too. I will follow John Miles Foley in viewing oral poetry as existing on a spectrum from that which is entirely orally performed and composed and aurally received to that which is entirely composed and performed with pen (or chisel) in hand and received as a textual product as well (what Foley terms *oral performance* and *written oral poems* respectively; 2002, 38–53). When it comes to runic poetry, the committing of this oral tradition to writing in fact corresponds with what often happens in oral societies where writing systems are introduced: Orally performed poetry coexists for a time with written oral poetry following the same poetic rules (Benson 1966; Finnegan 1977, 6; Opland 1971). This understanding of how oral poetry functions presents us with the possibility of unproblematically viewing runic poems as oral, regardless of whether they were first performed orally and then carved in, for instance, stone (and thus fit Foley's *oral performance* type) or composed specifically to be carved in stone, bone, etc (thus being *written oral poems*). Importantly, in many oral cultures, poetry is viewed not as stable, fixed works of an individual poet or author, but as changeable performances of traditional poetic structures and units composed to fit a given context or occasion by a skilled oral poet (Foley 2002, 14, 59–60).

In taking this view of runic poems as oral poems, I will try to explain some of the similar poetic expressions in question as oral formulae in the sense proposed by Milman Parry.[5] That is, as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (Parry 1930, 80; cf. Lord 1960, 30–67). This "essential idea" (here used without any notions of essentialism connected to it) will be expanded with Foley's notion of the formula as a "byte of diction" (Foley 2002, 110) which unlocks a backdrop of culturally dependant, idiomatic meaning in

[4] For instance, in many runic poems, the use of formulae is linked to the spatial context in which the particular stone was raised like *hiær mun standa* / *stæinn næʀ brautu* of Ryda kungsgård (U 838) and its many variants (see Wulf 2003, 976–78); *vitring þessa* / *ā vægemōti* of Bräkentorp (Sm 45) and Skaftarp (Sm 60); the *sten ā biargi* of Hällestad 1 and 2; as well as formulae referring to the stone itself, often using the word *mærki* (see Wulf 2003, 979–81).

[5] See Finnegan (1977, 58–73) for an overview of the use of the term *formula* in the Parry-Lord, oral-formulaic sense.

performance – be it written or oral. Additionally, using Foley's work on how *words* in oral poetry differ from *words* in literary poetry (2002, 18–20) will aid us in identifying some of the main issues that arise when treating oral poems as literary products. In much oral poetry, *words* are not necessarily equal to black signs separated by spaces on a white background. Words in oral poetry, and also in runic poetry, can indeed be such morphemes, but often they can more "productively be seen as meaningful units of utterance ranging from formulae to stock scenes" (Nygaard 2021, 159). This understanding gives us a wider understanding of what verbatim repetition may mean.

The oral formulae to be taken into consideration will be grouped into three categories which are proposed to create idiomatic meaning by presenting variants of the same trope specific to late Viking-Age honour culture. They do so by lauding the commemorated man's (real or idealised) display of what may be termed *hegemonic masculine behaviour*, which is that particular kind of masculinity that a society values most at any given time (cf. Connell 2005, 67–87; Evans 2019, 10–26; Jefford Franks 2023). According to Gareth Lloyd Evans (2019, 26), who bases his working model of hegemonic masculinity on an inversion of the discussion of insults and *níð* in the Old Norse world (cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1983; Clover 1993), Old Norse hegemonic masculinity can be performed in many ways. To Evans, the most important elements of this form of masculinity are that one "must act heroically…; must be bold, sincere, and responsible…; must act according to the dictates of honour at all times" (Evans 2019, 26). The three types of oral formulae to be analysed correspond to these aspects of masculine behaviour referring to 1. valour in battle; 2. being eloquent, generous, and hospitable; and 3. being an *ōnīðingʀ*, that is, a person who acts honourably and in accordance with the expectations of society. The oral formulae will be treated in turn in the following.

Valour in Battle

The long-line *Saʀ flo ægi* / *at Upsalum* is found on two stones from southern Skåne, Sweden: The Hällestad stone 1 and the Sjörup stone (cf. Lindqvist 1973). These stones have both been reused as building material; in the medieval church of Hällestad built *c.* 1450 (DaRu, Hällestad-sten 1) and in a bridge over the Skivarp stream close to Sjörup in the 1700s (DaRu, Sjörup-sten) respectively.

The inscription on Hällestad 1 translates to:

> Áskell placed this stone in memory of Tóki, son of Gormr, a faithful lord to him. He did not flee at Uppsala. Valiant warriors placed, in memory of their brother, the stone on the hill steadied with runes. They went closest to Gormr's Tóki.

The last part of the inscription on Hällestad 1 is metrically formed and makes up one of only thirteen poetic stanzas in the runic poetic corpus (according to Naumann 2018, 16). It is composed in *fornyrðislag* (Lindqvist 1973, 17), and reads in Runic Danish normalisation (following DaRu, Hällestad-sten 1):

Sāʀ flō ēgi / at Upsalum.
Sattu dræng[i]aʀ / æftiʀ sinn brōður
stēn ā biargi / stuððan rūnum.
Gōrms Tōka / gingu næstiʀ.

The inscription on the Sjörup stone translates to: "Saxi placed this stone in memory of Ásbjǫrn Tófi's/Tóki's son [see further below], his partner. He did not flee at Uppsala, but fought as long as he had a weapon."

The final part of the inscription contains a *helmingr* (in either *fornyrðislag* or *ljóðaháttr*; see Naumann 2018, 89–90), and in Runic Danish normalisation it reads (DaRu, Sjörup-sten):

Sāʀ flō ægi / at Upsalum,
en vā með hann / vāpn hafði.

The fact that these two stones may be connected to a historical Viking-Age battle has led scholars to propose a closer connection between the stones than the inscriptions themselves seem to allow. Furthermore, this putative connection has also meant a lot for the understanding of the formula on the stones. Presumably, the battle *at Upsalum* referred to on both stones is the Battle of Fýrisvellir, which is described by many medieval Latin and Old Norse sources (for instance, Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* and *Knytlinga saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*; cf. Snædal 1985). The battle is thought to have taken place in the 980s at the Fýrisvellir, which is located where modern-day Uppsala is now situated. This interpretation was first put forward by P. A. Munch in 1848 (see also Brate and Bugge 1891, 286; Wimmer 1895, 1:97–100; and Snædal 1985). Lis Jacobsen, however, remained thoroughly unconvinced of the connection between the stones and the battle (for instance, 1932, *DR*, 348–49; cf. Stoklund 1991). Whether or not the battle referred to is Battle of Fýrisvellir is not all that important to what concerns us here, but the fact that both inscriptions include the same long-line has made many scholars connect the people mentioned on, as well as the carver or poet behind, the stone too (for instance, Lindqvist 1973; Wulf 2003, 73–74; Naumann 2018, 88). There are, however, compelling reasons to doubt such a connection – both on theoretical and empirical grounds.

The Sjörup stone was raised by Saxi for Ásbjǫrn who was the son of either Tófi or Tóki. However, because this stone was cut up and reused as building material, the reading of its inscription is fraught with difficulty. Especially because the cut in the stone towards its base has partially obscured the name of Ásbjǫrn's father (as well as presumably a Christian cross originally found on the stone). However, both Jon Skonvig in 1627 (Fig. 1, right) and Sven Lagerbring in the mid-1700s (Fig. 1, left) depicted the cross and recorded the name of Ásbjǫrn's farther as **tufa**, Tófa in Old Norse (genitive of Tófi) before the stone was cut up. Later restorations, however, do not seem to have made it clear whether the name on the Sjörup stone should be rendered Tófa (in accordance with the early drawings) or Tóka (the genitive of Tóki) to fit with the presumed connection to the Tóki Gormsson of Hällestad stone 1 (and 3, DR 297). The confusion

arises from the fact that only one side-stroke separates the runes ᚠ (f) and ᚴ (k). The most recent high-definition photos from 2015 taken by Roberto Fortuna from the Danish National Museum, however, seem to quite clearly indicate that the rune in question does have two sidestrokes, making it a ᚡ (f; Fig. 1, centre). Additionally, this reading has been confirmed in an on-site autopsy carried out in April 2024 by the author in the company of Lisbeth M. Imer and Frederikke Reimer (see Fig. 2) This means, that we are either dealing with an error on the part of the carver or, more likely, that Ásbjǫrn is the son of Tófi and not Tóki.

Quite possibly, the Sjörup stone and the Hällestad-stone 1 are connected to the same battle, whether this is the Battle of Fýrisvellir or not, but it seems unlikely that they are connected to the same family or war leader, which is argued for by, for instance, Ivar Lindqvist (1973) or Fred Wulf (2003, 974). Subsequently, it does thus not seem necessary to attribute the presence of the formula *Saʀ flo ægi / at Upsalum* on both stones to their being either carved by the same person, to the runic poems being composed by the same poet, or indeed to one runic poem quoting from the other as has been done in the past. Wulf, for instance, suggests that the same poet was responsible for the poem(s) behind these inscriptions writing that "[a]uf Sjörup wird die erste Langzeile von Hällestad 1 wiederholt" (Wulf 2003, 974; 'on Sjörup the first long-line from Hällestad 1 is repeated,' Naumann 2018, 89). However, as oral poetry, these runic poems make use of oral formulae in a way which is consistent with both Old Norse poetry and Viking-Age oral culture employing the expression under the same metrical conditions to express the same idea of valour in battle.[6]

On Hällestad 1, the display of hegemonic masculinity through valour is connected both to Tóki and his death in battle, and to the men who raised the stone. They describe themselves as *drængiar* (Runic Danish, pl. of Old Norse *drengr*), which may be translated as "idealised, brave humans" (Fritzner 1883–96, 264; cf. Jesch 2001, 216–18) or in our context 'valiant warriors.' The concept of the *drengr* is "conventionally held up as the very soul of masculine excellence in Norse culture" (Clover 1993, 372) – what we here have termed hegemonic masculinity. This also fits with the formula shared between the two stones, which details heroic valour in combat by not fleeing when one (presumably) had the chance to do so.

[6] Cf. Page 1987, 5–6; Naumann 2018, 90 for Old English poetic parallels to the Sjörup inscription.

Figure 1. Left: Sven Lagerbring's drawing of Sjörup stone (mid-1700s, Public Domain).
Centre: The damaged name on the Sjörup stone, with indications that the third rune is an ᚠ (f), Roberto Fortuna (2015, Danish National Museum, CC-BY-SA).
Right: Jon Skonvig's drawing of the Sjörup stone (1627, Public Domain).

Figure 2. Detail of the Sjörup stone clearly showing the groove mark of the second side-stroke of the f-rune in **tufa**. Photo: The author.

Since both men commemorated on the two stones died in what we presume was the same battle it makes sense that this formula was used to refer to both Tóki's and Ásbjǫrn's display of hegemonic masculinity by referring to their heroic acts in battle *at Upsalum*.

Eloquence, Generosity, and Hospitality

This category is somewhat less uniform than the other two categories treated in this chapter. We are dealing with three variant formulae all centering around the trope of eloquence, generosity, and hospitality. S. B. F. Jansson (1964, 232–33) has argued that the stones of Ryssby kyrka, Ivla, and the Transjö stone have been carved by the same person due to the many similarities in the spelling, abbreviations, style, and composition of these inscriptions (cf. Stille 1999). As an addendum to his argument, Jansson notes the close parallels between the runic poems on these three stones and the Vist stone from Västergötland (Vg 187) which he ascribes to a common oral tradition (Jansson 1964, 234). In connection with the formulae on Ryssby kyrka, Ivla, and Hastugan, Wulf (2003, 975), however, argues that "die Verfasser der Verse gingen also mit dem ihnen überlieferten Formelgut frei um, fühlten sich nicht verpflichtet, sich an den genauen Wortlaut zu halten" ('the author of the verses worked freely with the transmitted formulaic goods, did not feel obligated *to keep to the exact wording*,' my emphasis). This quote plainly shows the pitfalls of working with oral poetry using preconceptions stemming from written poetry. While Wulf here seems to acknowledge an underlying oral tradition, he still sees the poems as stable compositions to ideally be quoted *word-for-word* in a quite literary manner. Keeping Foley's work on the differences between *words* in oral and literary poetry in mind (2002, 18–20; see above), we should have none of the same worries about the lack of verbatim repetition that seems to ail Wulf. Here, the formula as a *word* is used under the same metrical conditions to create idiomatic meaning – entirely in line with how formulae are thought to work in oral poetry. In this case, the meaning created relates to that part of Old Norse hegemonic masculinity to do with sincerity and responsibility in the form of eloquence, generosity, and hospitality. These elements are thought to be staples of Old Norse ethical behaviour (Lindow 2020, 500–2) which was strongly related to the expectations of free, able-bodied men (ibid., 480).

The formulae share structural similarities because all the formulae use m-alliterations in either the pair *mildan:mataʀ* or the thrice-stressed *mandr/mildr:mataʀ:mālsrisinn* (cf. *Hávamál* stanza 39; Wulf 2003, 975). The formulae in question are found on the stones from Ryssby kyrka (Sm 39) found in 1844 as a threshold stone in the old church (*SRI* 4, 125); Hagstugan (Sö 130) found and reraised in 1854 close to a natural hill between two lakes and visible from an old footpath (*SRI* 3, 96–97); Ivla (Sm 44) reraised sometime during the 1700–1800s near a road close to its original placement (*SRI* 4, 136–37); Västra Väppeby (U 703) reraised in 1927 close to a road c. 60 m from the presumed original placement (*SRI* 8,3, 225); and Gådi (U 739) standing *in situ* c. 200 m from an old road close to a couple of natural hills (*SRI* 8,3, 281). On three of the five stones (Ryssby kyrka, Hagstugan, and Gådi, see Fig. 3) we find crosses hinting at the plausibly Christian

context of these inscriptions. As noted, this sort of cultural continuity of the trope of hegemonic masculinity will be treated below. In the following, we shall keep to the runic poems in question and only paraphrase the prose of the inscriptions because the poems are at the heart of the matter at hand.[7]

Fig. 3. The Gådi stone (U 739) clearly showcasing the cross as a part of its ornamentation. Photo: The author.

Ryssby kyrka (Sm 39) was raised by Gunni for his father, who is praised with the following runic poem:

mildan o[rða / ok] mataʀ gōða[n][8]
[…] generous with words and free with food

The Hagstugan inscription (Sö 130) is remarkable in that it is one of few rune stone inscriptions presumed to be entirely metrical (Fyrby [Sö 56] being another example).

Unfortunately, the reading of the final part of the inscription is very challenging due to the use of "avvikande skrift" (Bianchi 2010, 119) (diverging writing) like *samstavsruner* as well as damage to the stone. While it is often left uninterpreted, it is highly likely that the final part too is metrical (ibid., 120) and would presumably consist of a final long-line making the inscription a full *fornyrðislag* stanza. Brate and Bugge (1891, 321–22),

[7] Complete inscriptions can be found through the *Runor* database by searching for the relevant signum (i.e. Sm 39 for Ryssby kyrka) or by consulting the relevant published editions (*DR* or *SRI*).
[8] The Runic Swedish transcriptions are quoted using the *Runor* database but with slight adjustments of vowel length. Hard brackets signify runes of uncertain provenance due to e.g. damage to the inscriptions.

among others, have suggested a metrically sound reconstruction of the part in question which is not, however, included here due to the uncertainty of such resonctructions and because it does not affect the overall argument of this section.

Fiuriʀ gærðu / at faður gōðan
dȳrð drængila / at Dōmara,
mildan orða / ok mataʀ gōðan,
[…]
Four [sons] made for the good father [the] magnificence as befits men, for Domari [who was] generous with words and free with food […]

Ivla (Sm 44; Brate and Bugge 1891, 242) was raised by Vímundr for his brother Sveinn. The inscription's final part is metrical making up a *helmingr* in *fornyrðislag* praising Sveinn for his generosity, hospitality, and generally honourable behaviour:

mil[dan við] sinna / [ok] mataʀ gōðan,
ī orðlofi / allra m[ikl]u.

[…] generous towards his [own people] and free with food, much praised by all.

Västra Väppeby (U 703) was raised by Ásví for her son Arnulfr, who is praised with a single long-line at the end of the inscription.

mandr mataʀ [g]ō[ð]r / ok māls risinn.
[…] a man free with food and eloquent.

The final inscription of this category, the Gådi stone (U 739; Fig. 3), is atypical, because it is raised by Holmbjǫrn for himself making the praise in the long-line at the end of the inscription ring somewhat hollow. Nonetheless, the inscription lauds Holmbjǫrn for his hospitality, generosity, and eloquence.

Hann vaʀ mildr mataʀ / ok mālsrisinn.
He was free with food and eloquent.

The idiomatic meaning created with the use of these oral formulae is connected to eloquence, generosity, and hospitality. Additionally, like the inscription on the Hällestad 1 stone, the Hagstugan runic poem's references to displays of hegemonic masculinity are double: The inscription praises both the father, Domari, for whom the stone was raised for his eloquence and hospitality and the four sons who raised the stone: something which is described as being done *drængila* ('valiantly,' Old Norse *drengila*, cf. Finnur Jónsson 1931, 85). This is a poetic adverbial form of *drengiligr*, which translates to 'valiant, brave, manly,' and which has been discussed above as possibly referring to hegemonic masculine behaviour. This is why *drængila* here is equated with an ideal, appropriate behaviour for the men who raised the stone.

The *ōnīðingʀ*

The oral formula *Hann vaʀ manna* / *mæstr ōnīðingʀ* (and its variants; see above on oral poetic *words* and variance) seems to have been very widespread geographically stretching from Aarhus, Denmark in the south-west to Hovgården, Östergötland in the north-east. These runic poems are all concerned with the concept of *níð*, which has a quite long research history within Old Norse studies (for instance, Almqvist 1965–74; Ström 1972; Meulengracht Sørensen 1983; Clover 1993). While Preben Meulengracht Sørensen sees the insults that are associated with *níð* in the Old Norse corpus as primarily having to do with gender and sexuality, Carol Clover nuances this stance by seeing the *níð*-insults as also having much to do with power. Importantly, these two researchers are used by Gareth Lloyd Evans (2019, 25–26) when building his model of hegemonic masculinity in the Old Norse world. He does so, as noted above, by inverting the trope of *níð*. By this logic, where hegemonic masculinity is the absence or inversion of *níð*, an *ōnīðingʀ* must be a person who performs hegemonic masculinity to its fullest (cf. Jesch 2001, 243, 258–59). This is also the picture that we get when analysing the examples below.

The use of this formula ranges from single long-lines (Aarhus 5 and Hovgården) to a *helmingr* (Transjö) and lastly three long-lines in combination (Rörbro). In the last two instances, the formula is used in combination with the two other tropes treated in this chapter: valour in battle (Transjö) and being hospitable (Rörbro). As noted above, S. B. F. Jansson contends that the formula on the stones from Transjö and Rörbro as well as the formula shared between Transjö and the stone from Vists kyrka (Vg 187) could be due to the respective long-lines being "formelartat allmängods" (Jansson 1964, 234; 'formulaic common knowledge').

Two of the stones are believed to still stand *in situ* after having fallen over on their presumed original locations (Rörbro, *SRI* 4, 119; Transjö, *SRI* 4, 41), with the two others having been reused as building material. Aarhus 5 was discovered in the chancel arch of Frue Kirke in Aarhus in 1905 (*DR*, 105) while the Hovgården stone was found during repair work in a cellar of a building on the old royal estate in 1867 (*SRI* 2, 78).

Aarhus 5 (DR 68; DaRu, Aarhus-sten 5) was raised for Ǫzurr *saxi* by his *felagar*, perhaps trade guild partners (cf. Imer 2021, 45–46), Tōsti, Hōfi, and Freybjǫrn. They praise Ǫzurr with the following long-line, which is followed by the mention of Ǫzurr's owning a ship with an Arni.

> *Sāʀ dō manna* / *mæst[r] ūnīðingʀ*
> He died as the most unvillainous among men.

Hovgården (Ög 77) was placed by Tunna in memory of her husband Þorfastr, who is praised with this formula:[9]

[9] Henrik Williams (2024) has suggested that the transliteration of Ög 77 should be *Vas hann man mæst ōnīðingʀ*, which would alter both the meaning (he was a slave, but most [of all] an *ōnīðingʀ*) and render

Vas hann manna / mæstr ōnīðingʀ
He was the most unvillainous among men.

Transjö (Sm 5; Brate and Bugge 1891, 246–48) was placed by Gautr in memory of his son Ketill. Ketill is praised with the following runic poem:

Hann vaʀ manna / mæstr ōnīðingʀ,
eʀ ā Ænglandi / aldri tynði.
He was the most unvillainous among men, [he] who lost his life in England.

Rörbro (Sm 37; Brate and Bugge 1891, 243–46; Fig. 4) was possibly part of a larger monument due to the use of the words *kumbl þessi*, or these monuments (Gräslund 2020, 123), which were raised by Ǫzurr for his father, whose name is debated, but possibly a form of Øyvindr (cf. Peterson 2007, 269–70). Ǫzurr praised Øyvindr with a runic poem of three long-lines:

Hann vaʀ manna / mæstr ūnīðingʀ,
vaʀ yndr mataʀ / ok ōmun hatrs.
Gōðr þegn Guðs trō / gōða hafði.

He was the most unvillainous among men, [he] was free with food and had no mind for hate. The good *þegn* had a good belief in God.

Fig. 4. The Rörbro stone (Sm 37) standing close to the crossing of a stream and bearing a cross. Photo: Pål-Nils Nilsson, Riksantikvarieämbetet, CC-BY.

the inscription unmetrical because *man* cannot carry alliteration due to its short vowel length (cf. Marold 2012). If this interpretation is followed, Ög 77 should not be included here.

The Transjö-inscription combines the *ōnīðingʀ*-formula with a long-line detailing valour in battle, which was also the trope in the *Sāʀ flō ægi*-formula. In addition, the long-line in question, *eʀ ā Ænglandi* / *aldri tynði*, forms an oral formula in itself with a parallel from Västergötland, Sweden, in the Vist inscription (Vg 187) which includes this formula as a single long-line at the end of the inscription. This strengthens the assumption of this chapter: 1. that the formulae under scrutiny are used to praise the commemorated men's display of hegemonic masculinity; and 2. that runic poetry is a form of oral poetry in which oral formulae are used as bytes of diction that create culturally specific, idiomatic meaning (to paraphrase Foley 2002, 110) – not as, for instance, Naumann contends concerning the Aarhus 5 stone and the *Saʀ do manna* / *mest uniðingʀ* formula that "[e]s ist durchaus möglich, dass es sich um ein Zitat aus einem Nachrufgedicht handelt." (Naumann 2018, 76; 'it is entirely possible that we are dealing with a quote from a memorial poem').

Interestingly, three of these four stones (Aarhus, Hovgården, and Rörbro) include Christian crosses of various shapes, which was also the case for three of the stones in the former category, and the Sjörup stone in the first category. The Rörbro stone even refers to the "good belief in God" of the man commemorated on the stone, possibly an Øyvindr (see above). On this stone, we are informed about three distinct strengths of Øyvindr's. The first long-line pronounces him firstly the greatest *ūnīðingʀ*; the second long-line notes that he was hospitable and a fair person (cf. Hübler 1996, 128), which was also the notion behind the *mildan*/*mataʀ*-formula; and the third long-line tells us about the *þegn*'s (presumably a socially high-standing landowner; Jesch 2001, 225–29; 2013, 89–95) staunch belief in the Christian God. This three-fold exploration of the aspects of Viking-Age hegemonic masculinity relevant to this chapter seems to indicate a cultural continuity of the notion of the *níðingr*. As noted earlier, this continuity is a good example of how ideas from a pre-Christian Nordic honour culture find continued relevance in early Nordic Christianity. It also shows that the Viking Age was a time of cultural transmission and change, and that we cannot take for granted that notions which in some contexts may be viewed as 'pagan' – like that of the *níðingr*[10] or indeed heroic actions in battle – necessarily should be seen that way in other contexts.

Conclusions

In this chapter I hope to have shown two things: 1. That viewing the poetry found on Viking-Age rune stones as a form of oral poetry rather than strictly literary products provides a fruitful explanatory framework which avoids many of the somewhat idiosyncratic interpretations of the relations between runic poems that use similar oral formulae; and 2. That the framework of hegemonic masculinity can be utilised productively to account for the idiomatic meaning created in the oral formulae used in the runic poems selected for analysis here. A form of masculinity held in high regard in Viking-Age Scandinavian society – be it late pagan or early Christian.

[10] See Lindow (2020, 492–94) on the term's connections to *ergi* and the runic evidence of, for instance, the seventh-century Stentoften (DR 357) and Björketorp (DR 360) stones.

Bibliography

Almqvist, Bo. 1965–74. *Norrön niddiktning: Traditionshistoriska studier i versmagi, I: Nid mot furstar; II: Nid mot missionärer* [Norse *níð*-poetry: Traditional historical studies in verse magic, I: *níð* against rulers; II: *níð* against missionaries]. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Benson, Larry D. 1966. "The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry." *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 81, no. 5: 1–334.

Bianchi, Marco. 2010. *Runor som resurs: Vikingatida skriftkultur i Uppsala och Södermanland* [Runes as a resource: Viking Age written culture in Uppsala and Södermanland]. Runrön 20. Institutionen för nordiska språk.

Brate, Erik, and Sophus Bugge. 1891. *Runverser: Undersökning af Sverige metriska runinskrifter* [Runic verses: A survey of Swedish metrical runic inscriptions]. Ivar Heggströms boktryckeri.

Clover, Carol. 1993. "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe." *Representations* 44: 1–38.

Connell, Raewyn W. 2005. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Polity Press.

DaRu, Aarhus-sten 5, https://runer.ku.dk/q.php?p=runer/genstande/genstand/63 Danske Runeindskrifter, 2 February 2024.

DaRu, Hällestad-sten 1, https://runer.ku.dk/q.php?p=runer/genstande/genstand/291 Danske Runeindskrifter, 2 February 2024.

DaRu, Sjörup-sten, https://runer.ku.dk/q.php?p=runer/genstande/genstand/275 Danske Runeindskrifter, 2 February 2024.

DR (+ no.) = Inscription published in *Danmarks runeindskrifter*, i.e. *DR*.

DR = Jacobsen, Lis, and Erik Moltke, eds. 1942. *Danmarks Runeindskrifter: Text* [Denmark's runic inscriptions: Text]. Ejnar Munksgaard.

Evans, Gareth Lloyd. 2019. *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*. Oxford University Press.

Finnegan, Ruth. 1977. *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*. Cambridge University Press.

Finnur Jónsson. 1931. *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguæ Septentrionalis: Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog* [Lexicon Poeticum Antiquæ Linguæ Septentrionalis: Dictionary of the Norwegian-Icelandic skaldic language]. 2nd ed. S. L. Møllers bogtrykkeri.

Foley, John Miles. 2002. *How to Read an Oral Poem*. University of Illinois Press.

Fritzner, Johan. 1883–96 [repr. 1973]. *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog* [Dictionary of the Old Norse language]. 4th ed. Universitetsforlaget.

Gräslund, Anne-Sofie. 2020. "*Kumbl* and *stafr* in Runic Texts." In *Re-imagining Periphery: Archaeology and Text in Northern Europe from Iron Age to Viking and Early Medieval Periods*, edited by Charlotta Hillerdal and Kristin Ilves, 117–24. Oxbow Books.

Gustavson, Helmer. 2012. "Därom tvistade de lärde: den sentationella runinskriften på nålbrynet från Sigtuna" [The scholars argued about this: the sensational runic inscription on the Sigtuna needle whetstone]. *Fornvännen* 107: 89–95.

Harris, Joseph. 2008. "Romancing the Rune: Aspects of Literacy in Early Scandinavian Orality." In *"Speak Useful Things or Say Nothing:" Old Norse Studies by Joseph Harris*, edited by Susan E. Deskis and Thomas D. Hill, 319–47. Islandica LIII. Cornell University Library.

Hübler, Frank. 1997. *Swedische Runendichtung der Wikingerzeit*. Runrön 10. Institutionen för nordiska språk.

Imer, Lisbeth M. 2021. "Runic Writing in Danish Medieval Towns." In *Urban Literacy in the Nordic Middle Ages*, edited by Kasper H. Andersen et al., 39–68. Brepols.

Jacobsen, Lis. 1932. "Vikingetidens 'historiske' danske Runeindskrifter" [The 'historical' Danish runic inscriptions from the Viking Age]. *Scandia V*.

Jansson, S. B. F. 1964. "Runstenen i Ryssby kyrka (Sm 39)" [The rune stone in Ryssby church (Sm 39)]. *Fornvännen* 59: 225–35.

Jefford Franks, Eirnin. 2023. "Gender in the Viking World." In *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*, edited by Leszek Gardeła, Sophie Bønding, and Peter Pentz, 31–39. Oxbow Books.

Jesch, Judith. 1998. "Still Standing in Ågersta: Textuality and Literacy in Late Viking-Age Rune Stone Inscriptions." In *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung: Abhandlungen des Vierten Internationalen Symposiums über Runen und Runeninschriften in Göttingen vom 4. –9. August 1995*. edited by Klaus Düwel, 462–75. De Gruyter.

———. 2001. *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse.* The Boydell Press.

———. 2013. "Runes and Words: Runic Lexicography in Context." *Futhark: International Journal of Runic Studies* 4: 77–100.

———. 2017. "Runes and Verse: The Medialities of Early Scandinavian Poetry." *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies* 47, no. 1: 181–202.

Marold, Edith. 2012. "Vers oder nicht Vers? Zum metrischen Charakter von Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark." *Futhark: International Journal of Runic Studies* 2: 63–102.

Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben. 1983. *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, translated by Joan Turville-Petre. The Viking Collection 1. Odense Universitetsforlag.

Munch, P. A. 1848. *Kortfattet fremstilling af den ældste nordiske runeskrift* [A concise presentation of the oldest Nordic runic writing]. Feilberg & Landmark.

Naumann, Hans Peter. 2018. *Metrische Runeninschriften in Skandinavien: Einführung. Edition und Kommentare*. In collaboration with Marco Bianchi and Ulrike Marx-Alberding. Narr Franke Attempto Verlag.

Nygaard, Simon. 2021. "*ein lǫg ok einn siðr:* Law, Religion, and their Role in the Cultivation of Cultural Memory in Pre-Christian Icelandic Society." *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 28: 146–77.

Lindow, John. 2020. "21 – Ethics." In *Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume II*, edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén: 479–507. Brepols.

Lindqvist, Ivar. 1973. *Poesien i inskrifterna på Hällestad-stenarna* [The poetry in the inscriptions on the Hällestad stones]. Lundastudier i nordisk språkvidenskab, Serie B, nr 8. Studentlitteratur.

Lord, Albert B. 1960. *The Singer of Tales*. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 24. Harvard University Press.

Opland, Jeff. 1971. "'Scop' and 'Imbongi:' Anglo-Saxon and Bantu Oral Poets." *English Studies in Africa* 14, no. 2: 116–78.

Page, R. I. 1987. *A Most Vile People: Early English Historian on the Vikings*. The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies. Viking Society for Northern Research.

Palm, Rune. 1992. *Runor och regionalitet: Studier av variation i de nordiske minnesinskrifterna* [Runes and regionality: Studies on variation in the Nordic commemorative inscriptions]. Runrön 7. Institutionen för nordiska spark.

Parry, Milman. 1930. "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral-Verse Making I: Homer and Homeric Style." *Havard Studies in Classical Philology* 41: 73–147.

Peterson, Lena. 2007. *Nordiskt runnamnslexikon* [Lexicon of Nordic runic names]. 5th ed. Institutet för språk och folkminnen.

Runor database, https://app.raa.se/open/runor/search Riksantikvarieämbetet, 5 February 2024.

Salberger, Evert. 1990. "Sigtuna-brynets runinskrift" [The runic inscription on the Sigtuna whetstone]. *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 105: 161–77.

Sievers, Eduard. 1893. *Altgermanische Metrik*. Max Niemeyer.

SkP Run, https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=skald&i=412 Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, 9 February 2024.

Sm (+ no.) = Inscription published in *Smålands runinskrifter*, i.e. *SRI* 4.

Snædal, Thorgunn 1985. "'Han flydde inte vid Uppsala…' Slaget på Fyrisvallarna och några skånska runstenar." ['He did not flee at Uppsala…' The battle of Fyrisvellir and some Scanian rune stones]. *Historisk tidskrift för Skåneland 2/1985*: 13–23.

SRI 2 = Brate, Erik, ed. and transl. 1911. *Sveriges runinskrifter*, *Andra bandet, Östergötlands runinskrifter, Text*. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien.

SRI 3 = Brate, Erik, and Elias Wessén, eds. and transl. 1924–36. *Sveriges runinskrifter*, *Tredje bandet, Södermanlands runinskrifter, Text*. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien.

SRI 4 = Kindander, Ragnar, ed. and transl. 1935–61. *Sveriges runinskrifter*, *Fjärde bandet, Smålands runinskrifter, Text.* Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien.

SRI 5 = Jungner, Hugo, and Elisabeth Svärdström, eds. and transl. 1940–71. *Sveriges runinskrifter*, *Femta bandet, Västergötlands runinskrifter*. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien.

SRI 8,3 = Wessén, Elias, and Sven B. F. Jansson, eds. and transl. 1949–51. *Sveriges runinskrifter*, *Åttonde bandet, Upplands runinskrifter, Tredje delen, Text.* Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien.

Stoklund, Marie. 1991. "Runesten, kronologi og samfundsrekonstruktion: Nogle kritiske overvejesler med udgangspunkt i runestenene i Mammenområdet." [Rune stones, chronology and social reconstruction: Some critical considerations based on the rune

stones in the Mammen region] In *Mammen: Grav, kunst og samfund i vikingetid* [Mammen: Grave, art and society in the Viking Age], edited by Mette Iversen in collaboration with Ulf Näsman og Jens Vellev, 285–97. Jysk Arkæologisk Selskabs Skrifter XXVII. Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

Stille, Per. 1990. *Runstenar och runristare i det vikingatida Fjärundaland: En studie i attribuering*. [Rune stones and rune carvers in Viking Age Fjärundaland: A study on attribution]. Runrön 13. Inst. för nordiska språk.

Ström, Folke. 1972. "Nid och ergi" [*níð* and *ergi*]. *Saga och sed* 1972: 27–47.

Sö (+ no.) = Inscription published in *Södermanlands runinskrifter*, i.e. *SRI* 3.

U (+ no.) = Inscription published in *Upplands runinskrifter*, i.e. *SRI* 8,3.

Vg (+ no.) = Inscription published in *Västergötlands runinskrifter*, i.e. *SRI* 5.

Williams, Henrik. 2024. "Erik Brate och runristaren Torkel" [Erik Brate and Torkel the rune carver]. Presentation given at *Det fjortonde heldagsrunrådet*, Riksantikvarieämbetet, Stockholm, 16 May 2024.

Wimmer, Ludvig. 1895. *De danske runemindesmærker undersøgte og tolkede, I* [The Danish runic monuments studied and interpreted, I]. Gyldendal.

Wulf, Fred. 2003. "Runenverse und Runenritzer." In *Runica – Germanica – Mediaevalia*, edited by Wilhelm Heizmann and Astrid van Nahl, 969–1006. De Gruyter.

Ög (+ no.) = Inscription published in *Östergötlands runinskrifter*, i.e. *SRI* 2.

GÁTUR GESTUMBLINDA: LEIKRÆNN ÞÁTTUR Í HEIÐREKS SÖGU

Vésteinn Ólason*

Heiðreks saga

Íslenskar fornsögur, einkum Íslendingasögur og fornaldarsögur, eru dramatískar að eðli; mikilvægur þáttur hverrar sögu eru tilsvör, tengd með frásögn þriðju persónu. Í sumum fornaldarsögum koma fyrir samtöl eða tilsvör í bundnu máli, jafnvel alllöng kvæði í sama stíl og hetjukvæðin í Eddu. Nokkur eddukvæði með samtölum í ljóðahætti hafa verið túlkuð sem eftirlíking eða jafnvel skrásetning leikrænna sviðsetninga. Bertha S. Phillpotts kannaði þetta og tengdi við helgiathafnir (Phillpotts 1920). Terry Gunnell hefur þróað þær kenningar áfram og m.a. bent á að þær fái stuðning í spássíumerkingum í Konungsbók eddukvæða (Gunnell 1995). Hér verður rætt um þátt í fornaldarsögu sem setja mætti á svið sem leikverk: Gátur Gestumblinda í Heiðreks sögu. Stuttlega verður fjallað um samhengið.

Heiðreks saga (einnig Hervarar saga og Heiðreks) er fornaldarsaga með fjölbreyttu efni. Sagnaminni frá víkingaöld og þjóðflutningaöld og alþjóðleg ævintýraminni mynda söguþráðinn. Á köflum er frásögnin borin uppi af tilsvörum í bundnu máli og stundum löngum samtalskvæðum. Líklegast er að rithöfundur hafi sett Heiðreks sögu saman úr arfsögnum og kveðskap úr ýmsum áttum sem lengur eða skemur hafði varðveist á manna vörum með margvíslegum tilbrigðum. Sagan segir frá fjórum kynslóðum göfugrar fjölskyldu á víkingaöld, víðast með harmrænum blæ. Í upphafsþætti falla bræður tólf í sama bardaga; fremstur þeirra er Angantýr. Í sögulok situr dóttursonarsonur hans og nafni, Angantýr konungur, einn eftir og harmar systkin sín tvö sem fallið hafa í styrjöld um föðurarf bræðranna. Sverðið Tyrfingur, sem er dvergasmíð, gengur frá kynslóð til kynslóðar í ætt söguhetjanna, og er sagt „allra [sverða] … bitrast, ok hvert sinn er því var brugðit, þá lýsti af svá sem af sólargeisla.

* Prófessor emeritus, Háskóli Íslands.

Aldri mátti hann svá hafa beran at eigi yrði hann manns bani, ok með vǫrmu blóði skyldi hann jafnan slíðra“.[1]

Fyrsta kynslóð eru Arngríms synir, tólf kappar af konungakyni sem berjast við Örvar-Odd og Hjálmar hinn hugumstóra í Sámsey. Mestur kappi er Angantýr sem ber Tyrfing. Bræðurnir falla allir og eru heygðir í Sámsey með vopnum sínum. Í þessum hluta sögunnar eru tilsvör einatt í bundnu máli og að lokum kvæðið Dánaróður Hjálmars, sem einnig er varðveitt í Örvar-Odds sögu. Efnið mun upphaflega hafa átt heima í sögnum um Hjálmar hinn hugumstóra og Örvar-Odd, enda er sjónum beint að þeim.

Aðalpersóna í öðrum hluta er Hervör dóttir Angantýs. Hún tekur karlmanns gervi og gengur í haug föður síns til að sækja Tyrfing. Í þeirri frásögn eru samtöl öll í bundnu máli og að lokum á Hervör langt samtal við drauginn föður sinn, sem nauðugur lætur Tyrfing af hendi. Hervör fer í víking en tekur að lokum upp sitt rétta gervi, giftist Höfundi syni Guðmundar konungs á Glasisvöllum, vitrum og ágætum konungi, og á með honum tvo syni, Angantý og Heiðrek.

Í þriðja hluta koma synir Hervarar til sögu, sem framan af er í lausu máli. Manna munur er á bræðrunum: Angantýr „vildi hverjum manni gott“, en „svo margt gott sem hann gerði, þá gerði Heiðrekr enn fleira illt. Hervǫr unni honum mikit“. Heiðrekur drepur bróður sinn og fer burt með Tyrfing. Segir margt af bardögum hans og undirferli. Þrjú börn á hann með þremur konungsdætrum, en verður loks konungur, „sezt nú um kyrrt ok gerist hǫfðingi mikill ok spekingr at viti“.

Í fjórða hluta eru börn Heiðreks, Angantýr, Hlöður og skjaldmærin Hervör, aðalpersónur. Ósætti hálfbræðranna um föðurarf leiðir til mikillar fólkorrustu og falls Hervarar og Hlöðs, en Angantýr er lengi konungur og lýkur sögunni með fróðleik um afkomendur hans. Frásögn af stríði þeirra Angantýs og Hlöðs er blanda lauss máls og bundins, en kjarninn er kvæði sem nefnt hefur verið Hlöðskviða og á sér mjög fornar rætur (Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason 2014, II, 168–75 og 421–30). Allur kveðskapur sem hér hefur verið vísað til er með fornyrðislagi.[2]

Heiðreks saga er varðveitt í fjölda handrita. Elst er Hauksbók (H) frá fyrsta áratug 14. aldar. Þar er sagan víða stytt, en þó aukin og breytt í þættinum um gáturnar. Sá hængur er á að eyða er í handritinu, svo að þar eru aðeins þrjár fyrstu gáturnar. Eyðan hefur verið fyllt eftir tveimur pappírshandritum af H-gerð. Þessari gerð Heiðreks sögu lýkur með gátuþættinum. Annað miðaldahandrit er GKS 2845 4to (R), og mun það vera skrifað um 1450 (Seelow 1981). Jón Helgason (1924) telur það besta handrit sögunnar, þótt þar séu margar villur. Gátuþátturinn er þar varðveittur í heild sinni. Til miðalda má enn rekja þriðju textagerðina (U), sem þó er aðeins varðveitt í pappírshandritum frá

[1] Þessi álög á sverðið rætast misvel, en í orðum Angantýs í samtali hans við Hervöru í haugnum kemur einnig fram að sverðið muni valda ógæfu: „Sjá mun Tyrfingr, / ef þú trúa mættir, / ætt þinni, mær, / allri spilla“. Sjá: Tolkien, útg. 1960, ix–xi. – Hér er vitnað til R-texta í útgáfu Jóns Helgasonar þegar annað er ekki tekið fram. Stafsetning er samræmd.

[2] Bygging Heiðreks sögu er meira í ætt við konungasögur en Íslendingasögur. Þótt þættirnir séu sundurleitir er fleira sem tengir þá en hér er nefnt, enda rétt að hafa í huga að í fagurfræði miðalda ríktu önnur lögmál um byggingu frásagna en í nútímaskáldsögum, eins og rómönsuhefðin ber skýrt vitni um. Rækileg greining á byggingu og formgerð Heiðreks sögu er: Torfi H. Tulinius 2002, 73–114.

17. öld. Þessar þrjár gerðir eru allar komnar af einni erkigerð.[3] Hér verður ekki frekar fjallað um varðveisluna en stuðst við texta þá sem Jón Helgason birtir í útgáfu sinni.

Gátur Gestumblinda

Lausamálsfrásögnin af ævi Heiðreks er samsett af sagnaminnum úr ýmsum áttum. Heiðrekur virðist ósigrandi, en umskipti verða í þætti Gestumblinda; þar segir frá gátukeppni, og eru gáturnar í bundnu máli. Heiðrekur hefur svarið þess eið „at aldri hefir maðr svá mikit af gert við hann at eigi skuli hann hafa réttan dóm spekinga hans … tólf … eða ella skal hann bera upp gátur þær er hann gæti eigi ráðit". Einn af óvinum Heiðreks er ríkur maður sem nefnist Gestumblindi. Heiðrekur boðar hann á fund sinn að sættast við sig ef hann vilji halda lífinu. Gestumblindi óttast reiði konungs og blótar Óðin til fulltingis. Óðinn tekur nú á sig gervi Gestumblinda og fer til fundar við konung. Þar eru honum gerðir þeir kostir að sæta dómi spekinganna eða bera upp gátur með lífið að veði. Gestumblindi tekur áskoruninni og ber upp hverja gátuna á fætur annarri, allar í bundnu máli, flestar með ljóðahætti. Þegar Heiðrekur getur ráðið allar gáturnar spyr Gestumblindi að lokum hverju Óðinn hafi hvíslað í eyra Baldri á bálinu. Heiðrekur skilur nú hver Gestumblindi er. Hann reiðist, bregður Tyrfingi og ætlar að leggja til Gestumblinda. Óðinn bregður sér þá í vals líki og flýgur burt en spáir því að þrælar muni verða Heiðreki að bana. Heiðrekur nær að höggva stélið af valnum, og er það sagt vera skýring á hve stutt það er. Spá Óðins rætist skjótt. Heiðreki hefnist þá fyrir illvirki sín, enda þótti það hin mesta svívirða höfðingjum að falla fyrir þrælum, eins og kom fyrir Hákon Hlaðajarl. Ekki bætti úr skák að vera veginn með eigin sverði.[4]

Þátturinn um gátur Gestumblinda er allbreytilegur í miðaldagerðunum þremur sem hér er miðað við. Í R eru 30 gátur, en í H eru þær 36, sjö þeirra eru ekki í R eða U, en eina R-gátu vantar í H. Í U eru gáturnar 28, allar eru þær bæði í R og H. Hér verður gert ráð fyrir að R sé næst erkiriti, tvær gátur hafi fallið niður í U-gerð, en ein fallið niður og sjö verið aukið við í H-gerð. Erfiðara er að komast að niðurstöðum um röð þeirra, þótt ýmislegt bendi til að hún sé næst erkiriti í R.[5]

[3] Jón Helgason, útg. 1924, lx–lxxxvi. Könnun á handritageymd sögunnar fram á 17. öld og tilbrigðum hennar er Love 2013. Bundið mál Heiðreks sögu var gefið út sérstaklega af Heusler og Ranisch, útg. 1903; sjá einnig: Margaret Clunies Ross, útg. 2017, 367–487; útgefandi kveðskapar úr Heiðreks sögu er þar Hannah Burrows.

[4] Fyrsta glíma mín við Gátur Gestumblinda var ritgerð til fyrri hluta prófs í íslenskum fræðum, sem lokið var vorið 1962 (Vésteinn Ólason 1962). Þar er fjallað miklu rækilegar um efnið en hér er svigrúm til; þó er þar ekkert um leikræna framsetningu.

[5] Um mun þessara þriggja gerða, orðamun, fjölda gátna og röð með tilliti til þess hvað muni vera í mestu samræmi við erkirit, sjá: Vésteinn Ólason 1962, 2–15. Ekki þjónar neinum tilgangi að reyna að endurgera erkirit á grunni varðveittra texta, en oft er hægt að leiðrétta einstakar villur með vísun til orðamunar handrita. Hér skiptir mestu máli að gefa gaum að einkennum hvors aðaltexta fyrir sig. Eins og Jeffrey Scott Love hefur sýnt fram á sýna yngri handrit að gátukaflinn hefur verið opnari fyrir breytingum en aðrir hlutar sögunnar: „… the riddles long remained the most unstable part of the saga. Stanzas were shuffled around and added or omitted in the base redactions … The riddles circulated without the rest of the saga more often than any other episode, and they tended to attract thematically similar items … they were continually reexamined and reinterpreted up through the seventeenth century" (Love 2013,

Rammafrásögnin um gátukeppnina milli Gestumblinda og Heiðreks á sér þekktar hliðstæður í fornískenskum bókmenntum. Skyldust eru Vafþrúðnismál þar sem Óðinn heimsækir jötun, keppir við hann um visku og vinnur að lokum með því að spyrja um orð sín í eyra Baldurs. Fjarskyldari eru önnur dæmi í eddukvæðum, svo sem Alvíssmál og Grímnismál, en einnig má nefna rammafrásögn Gylfaginningar, þar sem Gylfi dulbúinn sem Gangleri ber upp spurningar fyrir Æsi. Blindur gestur er nafn sem á vel við Óðin, og raunar er Gestumblindi eitt þeirra Óðinsheita sem talin eru upp í Þulum.[6] Spurninga- eða gátukeppnir þekkjast víða. Á Indlandi kepptust fornir konungar við að leysa gátur við helgiathafnir. Gátur nutu virðingar meðal Persa og Araba. Þeir sem voru snjallir að ráða gátur nutu virðingar en hinum var refsað sem mistókst (Aarne 1918–1920, 5–6; Hultgård 2023). Í Gamla testamentinu koma fyrir gátur, eins og í sögunni um Simson eða Samson, og hjá Hómer er minnst á gátur. Í þjóðsögum og ævintýrum margra þjóða eru dæmi um gátukeppni, og sumar skyldar þætti Gestumblinda. Skyldust er sagan um *Kaiser und Abt*, nr. 922 í skrá yfir gerðir þjóðsagna (Uther 2004, 552–54). Þar segir frá höfðingja sem fellur í ónáð hjá konungi og er boðaður á fund hans til að ráða gátur en þorir ekki að fara og sendir annan í sinn stað. Staðgenglinum tekst að ráða gáturnar og svara erfiðum spurningum og hlýtur laun fyrir. Þessi saga hefur verið þekkt um alla Evrópu allt frá 13. öld (Anderson 1923). Annað ævintýr sem er skylt Gátum Gestumblinda snýst um svo kallaðar höfuðlausnargátur: manni sem hefur verið dæmdur til dauða er gefinn kostur á að bjarga lífi sínu með því að leggja fyrir dómara gátu sem þeir geti ekki ráðið. Hann ber þá upp gátu sem byggð er á aðstæðum sem dómararnir geta ekki vitað um. Gátan er oft um hreiður í höfði kýr eða hests (Uther 2004, nr. 927); ein af gátum Gestumblinda er tilbrigði um hana, og gáta um grísafulla gyltu er af sama toga. Lokaspurning Gestumblinda er svo auðvitað óleysanleg fyrir alla aðra en Óðin sjálfan.

Ef gert er ráð fyrir að upphafleg fyrirmynd rammafrásagnarinnar hafi verið flökkusögn af sömu gerð og *Kaiser und Abt* sést að sagan hefur breyst á ýmsan hátt, t.d. eru gáturnar margar og í bundnu máli. Sá sem ber upp gáturnar er guð; það breytir eðli frásagnarinnar og er vafalaust til komið vegna áhrifa frá Vafþrúðnismálum og öðrum goðakvæðum og sögnum. Með því fær þátturinn goðsögulega vídd. Þegar Óðinn sýnir hver hann er verður það afdrifaríkt. Skapbrestir Heiðreks, sem hann hefur reynt að bæla

237). Hannah Burrows virðist gera ráð fyrir að gáturnar og röð þeirra séu næst erkiriti í H, þ.e. að gátum hafi verið sleppt í R og U, og þá væntanlega að lausa málið sé stytt í R (Clunies Ross, útg. 2017, 408). Hún ræðir ekki röksemdir Jóns Helgasonar fyrir því að H-gerð sé aukin, en samþykkir þó þá niðurstöðu hans að H og U séu skyldari en hvor gerð um sig er skyld R (Clunies Ross, útg. 2017, 369). Af því leiðir að þar sem sérefni H er ekki í U er rökrétt að gera ráð fyrir að það sé viðaukar. Hér verður þó litið á R og H sem sjálfstæð afbrigði þáttarins og þetta ekki rætt frekar.

[6] Þuluvísa sú sem geymir þetta heiti er ekki í aðalhandritum Snorra Eddu, en í brotum frá 14. öld, AM 748 I 4to og 757 4to, sjá: Finnur Jónsson, útg. 1912–1915 I A, 682. Líklegast er að nafnið sé þar tekið upp eftir Heiðreks sögu eða sögn sem hún hefur byggt á. Nafnið *Gestiblindus* kemur fyrir hjá Saxo í 5. bók, og eru viss líkindi með þeirri frásögn og inngangi Gestumblinda þáttar í Heiðreks sögu. Gestiblindus er þar konungur Gauta, en gamall og lítils megnugur og fær staðgengil til að ganga á hólm fyrir sig. Staðgengillinn fellir andstæðinginn og segir ekki meira af Gesti blinda. Óðinn kemur þarna ekki við sögu.

og dylja, brjótast fram af því að hann þolir ekki að Óðinn skuli hafa leikið á hann. Gripinn af bræði og ofsa (*hubris*) leggur hann til guðsins með sverðinu Tyrfingi og innsiglar þannig örlög sín.

Umgerðin um Gestumblinda þátt sýnir þekkingu á þjóðsögum, goðsögnum og kvæðum, og gátukeppnum. Einfaldasta skýring á tilurð þáttarins er að höfundur Heiðreks sögu hafi sjálfur sett saman þáttinn um Gestumblinda sem dramatískan endahnút á ævi Heiðreks og fyllt hann með gátum sem tiltækar voru, tekið sumar upp lítt breyttar eða óbreyttar en breytt formi annarra og tengt þær saman með formúlukenndum inngangsorðum að mörgum vísum og ráðningum.[7] Lok þáttarins falla þó ekki hnökralaust inn í söguna, og hugsanlegt er að gátuþáttur þar sem Óðinn tekur þátt sem staðgengill annars manns hafi verið meðal heimilda höfundarins þótt engar heimildir séu til um slíkan þátt (McKinnell 1994, 95–98).[8]

Einstakar gátur eru af ólíkum uppruna. Sumar eru hvergi annars staðar til, aðrar má finna í gátusöfnum frá ýmsum tímum, íslenskum, færeyskum og skandinavískum (Vésteinn Ólason 1962, 23–54).[9] Þótt aðeins fáar gátur aðrar en þessar komi fyrir í fornískenskum og norrænum bókmenntum er lítill vafi á að höfundur hefur sótt efnið í sjóð lifandi og auðugrar gátuhefðar.[10] Þrátt fyrir fátækt heimilda verður að álykta að listin að bera fram gátur hafi á miðöldum verið algeng á Íslandi eins og annars staðar. Ætla má að gáturnar hafi oftast verið í bundnu máli, og fær það stuðning af ummælum Ólafs Þórðarsonar í Þriðju málfræðiritgerðinni (Málskrúðsfræði):

> Enigma er myrkt sem um leynda líking hlutanna, sem hér:
> „fara ek sá / foldar moldbúa, / á sat nár á ná“.
> Þess konar figuru kǫllum vér gátu, ok er hon jafnan sett í skáldskap.
> (Björn Magnússon Ólsen, útg. 1884, 114)

Gátan sjálf er raunar ein af Gátum Gestumblinda, og virðist textinn vera betri hér en í handritum Heiðreks sögu. Orðin „ok er hon jafnan sett í skáldskap“ eiga sér ekki hliðstæðu í latneskum texta Donats sem birtur er neðanmáls í útgáfunni 1884.

Þótt gátukeppni sé ekki að finna annars staðar í fornískenskum bókmenntum er augljóst hve vel slík keppni er fallin til að sýna hvernig dramatísk átök magnast og leiða að lokum til falls aðalpersónunnar. Hver ný gáta eykur spennu: mun konungi takast að ráða gátuna og hvað gerist ef það tekst ekki? Samkvæmt rammafrásögninni er það aðeins Gestumblindi sem leggur líf sitt undir, en lesendur eða áheyrendur vita það sem

[7] Hugsanlegt er auðvitað að hann hafi þekkt sögn um Gestumblinda hliðstæða þeirri sem Saxo segir.

[8] „the name Gestumblindi, the confrontation with a king … and the story of why the falcon has a short tale all suggest an independent Odinic source, now lost“ (McKinnell 1994, 96). Sjá einnig Hultgård 2023. Þar eru færð rök fyrir því að Vafþrúðnismál eigi sér fornar rætur óháðar kristnum miðaldaritum og m.a. bent á hliðstæður í fornum írönskum og indverskum frásögnum af spurningakeppni. Hultgård bendir á að í írönsku heimildunum séu margar hliðstæður við Gátur Gestumblinda og bendir sérstaklega á staðgengilsminnið. En það minni er líka að finna í evrópskum sögnum, sbr. *Kaiser und Abt*.

[9] Ekki er ólíklegt að finna mætti fleiri hliðstæður með því að leita í heimildum sem birtar hafa verið eftir 1960.

[10] Þótt hér sé talað um „höfund“ og þá vísað til þess sem upphaflega setti þáttinn saman, er augljóst að aðrir „höfundar“ hafa komið til skjalanna, einkum sá sem jók við H-gerðina.

konungur veit ekki, að andstæðingurinn er guð, og skynja þá ógn sem lengi vel er hulin Heiðreki. Mun hann átta sig á að hans eigið líf er í húfi?

Sviðsetning

Þegar Gestumblindi gengur fyrir konung getur sá sem les eða heyrir séð fyrir sér salarkynni þar sem hirðin situr og spekingarnir næst konungi. Að sviðinu er annars varla vikið, en þó er bætt við í H: „Var síðan stóll settr undir Gestumblinda, ok hugðu menn gótt til at heyra þar vitrlig orð“. Við þetta verður sviðið sýnilegra og minnt er á viðstadda áheyrendur.[11]

Samræða Heiðreks og Gestumblinda, laust mál að mestu en með stuðlaðri formúlu í upphafi hverrar ráðningar, fléttast inn í framsögn einstakra gátna og dregur fram dramatískt eðli keppninnar. Texti R er stuttorður og hlutlaus, en í H er bætt við setningum, sem er bersýnilega ætlað að tryggja að hin undirliggjandi spenna og líklegar hugsanir keppenda fari ekki fram hjá lesandanum:[12]

> R: „Þat kýs ek“, segir hann, „at bera fyrr upp gáturnar“. „Þat er rétt ok vel fallit“, segir konungr.
>
> H: „Nei“, segir hann, „heldr vil ek bera gáturnar upp“. Konungr mælti: „Þat er ok rétt, en mikit liggr á; sigrar þú mik, þá skaltu eiga dóttur mína, ok á þér eigi þessa at varna; en ólíkr ertu til mikillar speki; en aldri varð þat enn, at ek sá eigi gátur þær, er fyrir mik váru upp bornar“. Var síðan stóll settr undir Gestumblinda, ok hugðu menn gótt til at heyra þar vitrlig orð.

Sæti Gestumblinda og tilvísun til viðstaddra áheyrenda sviðsetur samtalið meira en gert er í R. Textinn verður því líflegri og leikrænni í H. Oftrú Heiðreks á eigin visku og sigur í keppninni kemur skýrt fram í H en einnig hvaða örlög konungur ætlar Gestumblinda, því að hann er viss um sigur.

Ráðning fyrstu gátunnar er „öl“, gesturinn er þyrstur, og konungur skilur ábendinguna og býður að gestinum skuli færð mungát. Næsta gáta vísar til „vegar“, minnir á ferð gestsins til konungs. Þetta upphaf hjálpar lesanda eða áheyrendum að lifa sig inn í aðstæður, eins og þær væru raunverulegar; það er hluti af sviðsetningu, og minnir á upphaf Hávamála. Gestumblindi spyr nú um annars konar drykk, og sú gáta er ekki eins auðráðin. Konungur ræður hana þó strax rétt, en í H bætir hann við ráðninguna athugasemd sem sýnir að hann er þegar farið að gruna að keppnin verði ekki eins auðunnin og hann hafði haldið. Gestumblindi bregst við með því að reyna að draga úr tortryggni Heiðreks:

> „En ef þú ert sá Gestumblindi sem ek ætlaða, þá ertu vitrari en ek hugða, því at ek hefi spurt orð þín óvitrleg, en gerask nú á leið spakleg“. Gestumblindi mælti: „Þat er ván at mik þrjóti brátt, en þó vilda ek enn at þér hlýðit“.

[11] Gátuþátturinn er á bls. 56–83 í Jón Helgason, útg. 1924, og eru tilvitnanirnar auðfundnar þar.

[12] U fylgir R efnislega í lausa málinu, og því er ljóst að það er höfundur H-gerðar sem skapar tilbrigðin.

Eftir 4. gátu verður röðin mismunandi í gerðunum. Svar Heiðreks við 5. gátu H er nánast eins og við sömu gátu í R (15), en í H bætir konungur við athugasemd þar sem hann lætur í ljós grunsemdir um að gesturinn sé ekki sá sem hann sýnist vera:

> „En vélasamlega berr þú upp slíkar gátur ok vandmæli, hverr sem þú ert“.

Þessar grunsemdir eru ítrekaðar í svari Heiðreks við H6:

> „En mjǫk undrumk ek orðfimi þína ok vitrleik“.
> Gestumblindi mælti: „Ek em nú ok nálega þrotinn at gátum, en frekr er hverr til fjǫrsins“.

Viðbætur í H draga fram í dagsljósið þá spennu sem býr í aðstæðum, en lesandi R verður að láta ímyndunarfl sitt skapa þessa spennu. Ef R-texti er nálægt forriti H-gerðar sýna viðbæturnar hvernig eldri textinn kallar á skapandi viðbragð þess yngri. Keppendurnir tveir eru nú eins og hnefaleikamenn sem tipla á tám hvor í kringum annan í upphafi keppni og greiða fremur létt högg, en sá sem telur sig sigurstranglegri skynjar fljótt að andstæðingurinn muni sterkari en hann hefur gert ráð fyrir.

Konungur er fljótur að svara spurningunum í H7 (hvorki í R né U), og Gestumblindi svarar: „Vandask mun nú, ok veitka ek nú, hvat fyrir verðr“. – Það er eins og hann óttist nú að kunna ekki nógu erfiðar gátur. Í H koma næst þrjár gátur sem konungi þykja léttar, og hann lætur það í ljós með stuttum innskotum: Í svari við H10 segir hann: „Smækkask nú gáturnar“ og við H11: „Er nú margt til tínt er tordýflar eru ríkra manna spurningar“.

H10 og 11 eru ekki í R en líta má á þær sem tilraun til að sýna að Gestumblindi geri nú gáturnar léttari til draga úr áhyggjum konungs. Þetta stendur þó ekki lengi, og í H12 segir Gestumblindi:

> „Hvat er þat undra
> er ek úti sá
> fyrir dǫglings durum?
> tíu hefur tungur,
> tuttugu augu,
> fjóra tigu fóta,
> ferr hart sú vættr.
> Heiðrekr konungr,
> hyggðu at gátu“.

Hér neytir Gestumblindi yfirnáttúrlegra hæfileika sinna. Gátan er höfuðlausnargáta og í framhaldinu kemur eðli hennar í ljós.

> „Góð er gáta þín, Gestumblindi, getit er þeirar; þar sáttu sú, ok váru í henni níu grísir“. Lét þá konungr drepa súna, ok váru í henni níu grísir sem Gestumblindi hafði sagt. Þá mælti konungr: „Eigi veit ek nú nema vitrir eigi nú hlut í, ok eigi veit ek hvat manna þú ert“. Gestumblindi svarar: „Slíkr em ek sem þú mátt sjá, ok vilda ek gjarna þiggja líf mitt ok vera

> lauss af þessum þrautum“. Konungr mælti: „Upp skaltu bera gátur, þar til er þik þrýtr ella mik at ráða“.

Sama gáta er R26 og er þar betur fyrir komið svo nærri endalokum keppninnar. Svarið er styttra en inntakið hið sama:

> Konungr mælti þá: „Ef þú ert sá Gestumblindi sem ek hugða, þá ertu vitrari en ek ætlaði; en frá gyltinni segir þú nú úti í garðinum“. Þá lét konungr drepa gyltina, ok hafði hon níu grísi sem Gestumblindi sagði. Nú grunar konung hverr maðrinn mun vera.

Þessi lokaorð eru eina tilvísunin til hinnar raunverulegu aðstæðna sem er að finna í R, og þau koma hér þegar aðeins þrjár gátur og lokaspurningin eru eftir. Engar athugsemdir eru gerðar við R27 og 28 og staðsetning þeirra virðist ekki skipta máli. Það hefði verið áhrifaríkara ef R29 hefði verið eina gátan milli 26 og 30, af því að lausn hennar er Óðinn á Sleipni; hún er líka næstsíðasta gátan í H:

> „Hverir eru þeir tveir
> er tíu hafa fœtr,
> augu þrjú
> en einn hala?
> Heiðrekr konungr,
> hyggðu at gátu“.

Í R er svarið vafningalaust: „Þat er þá er Óðinn ríðr Sleipni“. Í H er inngangur að svarinu:

> „Góð er gáta þín, Gestumblindi, getit er þeirar; margs freistar þú nú, er þú finnr þau rǫk til framburðar við mik er forðum váru; þat er þá er Óðinn reið hestinum Sleipni; hann hafði átta fœtr en Óðinn tvá, en þeir hǫfðu þrjú augu, Sleipnir tvau en Óðinn eitt“.

Vitaskuld er ekki hægt að bera umframgátur H saman við R, en í lausu máli sem fylgir þeim er einnig að finna áhugaverðar tilvísanir til aðstæðna. Ein þeirra, H30, er af þeirri tegund gátna sem virðast vera klámfengnar en eru það ekki ef rétt er ráðið. Hér notar „höfundur“ H tækifærið til að beina athyglinni frá viðmælendum að áheyrendum, hirðinni, svo að sviðið lifnar við:

> Gestumblindi mælti:
> „Hest sá ek standa,
> hýddi meri,
> dúði dindil,
> drap hlaun undir kvið;
> úr skal draga
> ……
> ok gjøpta at góða stund.
> Heiðrekr konungr, hygg þú at gátu“.

> Þá svarar konungr: „Þessa gátu skulu ráða hirðmenn mínir“. Þeir gátu margs til ok eigi fagrs mjǫk. Þá mælti konungr sem hann sá at þeir gjǫrðu ekki at: „Hest þann kallar þú línvef, en skeið meri hans er upp ok ofan skal hrista vefinn“.

Eftir því sem lengra líður á keppnina fækkar slíkum athugasemdum í H, en svar við H32 sýnir að konungur skynjar að nú dregur að lokum keppninnar:

> „… en eigi veit ek hvat manna þú ert, er þvílíka hluti gerir svá mjúklega af lítlum efnum“. Ok nú biðr konungr í hljóði at byrgja skuli hallardyrnar.

Lýsing á viðbrögðum Heiðreks við lokaspurningu Óðins er orðfleiri í H en R:

> R: Heiðrekr konungr segir: „Þat veiztu einn, røg vættr!“ Ok þá bregðr Heiðrekr Tyrfingi ok høggr til hans, en Óðinn brást þá í valslíki ok fló á brott. En konungr hjó eftir ok af honum vélifiðrit aftan, ok því er valr svá vélistuttr ávallt síðan.
>
> H: Konungr svarar: „Undr ok argskap ok alla bleyði, en engi vissi þín þau orð útan þú einn, ill vættr ok ǫrm“. Konungr brá þá Tyrfingi ok hjó til Gestumblinda, en hann brást í vals líki ok fló út gegnum hallarglugg einn, en sverðit kom á vélit valsins, ok er hann því vélstuttr jafnan síðan svá sem heiðnir menn trúa.

H-gerð sviðsetur atburðina þegar R hefur aðeins almenna atvikalýsingu, flugið að hallarglugganum gefur frásögninni vídd.

Gátur Gestumblinda – ljóðleikur í ættarsögu

Hér er ekki svigrúm eða tilefni til að fjalla nánar um gáturnar sjálfar eða skáldskapargildi þeirra. Eins og fyrr segir er ljóðaháttur ríkjandi, eins og í samtalskvæðum Eddu, en þó eru nokkur dæmi um fornyrðislag. Í umgerð og sviðsetningu gátukeppninnar er að finna leikræna framsetningu efnisins.[13] Gáturnar eru langflestar afbagðs skáldskapur sem sýnir prýðilegt vald á kveðskaparstíl eddukvæða. Sá munur er á að eddukvæðin segja sögu, eru epísk, en gáturnar eru lýrík, hver annarri óháð.[14] Þær eru myndríkar og sækja mikið af efni sínu til náttúrunnar. Eins og gátum hæfir er orðalag yfirleitt hnitmiðað, sagnir vel valdar ekki síður en nafnorð, og fyrirbærin sem vísað er til fjölbreytileg (sjá nánar: Vésteinn Ólason 1962, 59–69). Ýmsir fræðimenn hafa farið lofsyrðum um gáturnar. Andreas Heusler lýsti þeim þannig:

> Überblicken wir die Gátur im ganzen, so stellen sie sich ohne Frage zu den allerbesten Erzeugnissen der Rätseldichtung. Sie haben einerseits mehr Fülle und Bewegung, stellen sich die poetische Aufgabe weit höher als die meisten Volksrätsel der letzten Jahrhunderte. Andererseits bewahren sie doch einen echten Rätselstil … (Heusler 1901, 148)

[13] Love (2012, 158–61) fjallar stuttlega um stöðu gátnanna og lausa málsins við söguna í heild.
[14] Burrows 2014 ber list gátnanna saman við eddukvæði.

Dramatík og spenna, átök tveggja keppenda, eru sjálfgefnir eiginleikar gátukeppninnar. Hvernig sem þátturinn um Gestumblinda hefur verið fluttur á miðöldum, af einum eða tveimur flytjendum, líkir frásögnin eftir leikrænni athöfn, og gátukeppnin er að því leyti hliðstæð við sennu og mannjöfnuð (Mitchell 2023, 87). Ekki þarf að efa að þeir sem lásu um eða hlýddu á frásögnina af gátukeppni þeirra Gestumblinda og Heiðreks hafa átt auðvelt með að sjá aðstæður innri sjónum: höll konungs með hirðfólki sem fylgist með af athygli, konunginn í sæti sínu og gestinn frammi fyrir honum. Þá mátti auka enn á skemmtunina með því að láta tvo einstaklinga skipta með sér hlutverkum og flytja textann, óbreyttan eða með tilbrigðum. Texti R-gerðar gerir meiri kröfur til áheyrendanna; þeir þurfa að skapa spennuna sjálfir. H-textinn hendir þennan bolta á lofti, og í sérefni þess texta verður bæði sviðsetningin og spennan milli keppenda áþreifanlegri. Áheyrendur fá þar góða hjálp til að skynja hve mikið er í húfi í þessari viðureign. Það er því sannarlega happ að varðveittar skuli vera fleiri en ein gerð textans. Það færir heim sanninn um að sagan átti sér líf eftir fyrstu skráningu.

Heiðreks saga er sett saman með efni úr ólíkum áttum. Tilgangur sögunnar er vafalaust að skemmta viðtakendum. En skemmtunin er ekki yfirborðslegt gaman. Þvert á móti leiðir sagan í ljós hvernig örlögin (og brestir í skapgerð) fella jafnvel hina fræknustu og vitrustu kappa; barátta um frægð og auð kostar fórnir. Heiðrekur er miðlæg persóna í sögunni. Hann byrjar feril sinn illa með bróðurvígi og svikum en virðist þó er á líður hafa sigrast á skapbrestum sínum og vera orðinn ágætur konungur (*rex iustus*). Óðinn sjálfur þarf að koma til leiksins til að fella Heiðrek og draga fram illt eðli hans og hroka. Til þess er gátukeppnin notuð. Sannarlega skapar hún spennu um endalok Heiðreks. Hin hörmulegu systkinavíg í fjórða hluta sögunnar, eru í raun afleiðingar af þeirri slóð svika sem Heiðrekur skilur eftir sig.

Skemmtilegt væri að setja keppni Gestumblinda og Heiðreks á svið eftir H-gerð. Terry Gunnell væri kjörinn leikstjóri þeirrar sýningar, og reyndar er líka auðvelt að sjá hann og heyra fyrir sér leika hlutverk Gestumblinda með tilþrifum og hárri raust.

Heimildir

Aarne, Antti. 1918–1920. *Vergleichende Rätselforschung* I–III. FF Communications 26–28. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Anderson, Walter. 1923. *Kaiser und Abt*. FF Communications 42. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Björn Magnússon Ólsen, útg. 1884. *Den tredje og fjærde grammatiske afhandling i Snorra Edda: Tilligemed de grammatiske afhandlingers prolog og to andre tillæg* [The Third and Fourth Grammatical Treatises in Snorri's Edda: with the prologue of the Grammatical Treatise and two other appendices]. S.T.U.A.G.N.L. 12. Knudtzons.

Burrows, Hannah. 2014. „Wit and Wisdom: The Worldview of the Old Norse-Icelandic Riddles and their Relationship to Eddic Poetry." Í *Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond: Poetic Variety in Medieval Iceland and Norway*, ritstj. Martin Chase, 114–35. Fordham University Press.

Clunies Ross, Margaret, útg. 2017. *Poetry in* fornaldarsögur*: Part I.* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 8. Brepols.

Finnur Jónsson, útg. 1912–1915. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* I–II, AB. Villadsen og Christensen.

Gunnell, Terry. 1995. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Brewer.

Heusler, Andreas. 1901. „Die altnordischen Rätsel.“ *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 21: 117–49.

Heusler, Andreas og Wilhelm Ranisch, útg. 1903. *Eddica minora: Dichtungen eddischer Art aus den* fornaldarsögur *und anderen Prosawerken.* Ruhfus.

Hultgård, Anders. 2023. „Remarques comparatives sur les *Vafþrúðnismál*.“ *Proxima Thule* 7: 103–23.

Jón Helgason, útg. 1924. *Heiðreks saga – Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs.* S.T.U.A.G.N.L. 48. Jørgensen.

Jónas Kristjánsson og Vésteinn Ólason, útg. 2014. *Eddukvæði* I–II. Íslenzk fornrit. Hið íslenska fornritafélag.

Love, Jeffrey Scott. 2012. „The Organization of Poetic Quotations in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*.“ Í *The Legendary Sagas. Origins and Development*, ritstj. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney og Ármann Jakobsson, 153–69. University of Iceland Press.

———. 2013. *The Reception of* Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks *from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Utz.

McKinnell, John. 1994. *Both One and Many: Essays on Chance and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*. Il Calamo.

Mitchell, Stephen A. 2023. *Old Norse Folklore: Tradition, Innovation and Performance in Medieval Scandinavia*. Cornell University Press.

Phillpotts, Bertha S. 1920. *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama.* Cambridge University Press.

Seelow, Hubert, útg. 1981. *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*. Stofnun Árna Magnússonar.

Tolkien, Christopher, útg. 1960. *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*. Thomas Nelson and Sons.

Torfi H. Tulinius. 2002. *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth Century Iceland.* The Viking Collection 13. Odense University Press.

Uther, Hans-Jörg. 2004. *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography. Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*. 3 vols. FF Communications 284–86. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Vésteinn Ólason. 1962. „Gátur Gestumblinda“ [Gestumblindi's riddles]. Ritgerð til fyrri hluta prófs í íslenskum fræðum, Háskóli Íslands.

WHEN A GOD DREAMS:
HVÍ VÆRI BALDRI BALLIR DRAUMAR

Stephen A. Mitchell*

Introduction

Pre-Christian religious practices relating to prophecies about the future and gaining access to other arcane areas of knowledge have in recent years focused especially intensely on the practice by ritual specialists known as *seiðr* (e.g., Price 2019 [2002]; Gardeła et al. 2023), but another junction between the quotidian world and "other worlds" is the node of communication represented by dreams. In discussing, i.a., encountering the supernatural in the sagas, Sävborg (2009, 331) emphasizes the possibility of dreams as liminal spaces, borderlands where "The dream functions as a meeting place between worlds, where the border is otherwise difficult or impossible to cross" (*Drömmen fungerar som en mötesplats mellan världarna, då gränsen annars är svår eller omöjlig att korsa*). And dreams too offer a very rich research area in Nordic folklore traditions. In a recent essay, for example, Terry Gunnell surveys native Nordic folk beliefs and folk practices about dreams, among other folklore evidence, concluding, that "that they reflect genuine oral memories of living beliefs that existed in the past rather than pure imagination or borrowings from foreign literary works" (2023, 149). Dreams were treated seriously in the Middle Ages, so much so that they were eventually seen as curable and treatment for them was even included in various medical manuals, as when, for example, one late medieval pharmacopeia recommends placing the leaf of a particular plant in your bed in order to save you from bad dreams (*Jtem henna bladh lagdh i säng the frälsa thik aff ondom drömwm*; *Läke- och örte-böcker*, 96).

But rather than looking to prevent or heal disturbing dreams in this way, earlier Nordic cultural traditions more often, like the folklore materials Gunnell examines, looked to understand or interpret such phenomena as being prophetic and predictive.

* Robert S. and Ilse Friend Professor of Scandinavian and Folklore, Harvard University.

And, of course, such prophetic visions and dreams are common in eddic and eddic-style poetry (e.g., *Atlamál*, *Hálfsrekkaljóð*, *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*, *Guðrúnarhvǫt*, *Hyndluljóð*) and are also frequently found in the sagas (e.g., *Flóamanna saga*, *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, *Grettis saga*, *Hálfdanar saga svarta*). The regular appearance of such dreams in the medieval Norse world has over the decades made Nordic dream culture subject to considerable scholarly discussion (selected examples include: Henzen 1890; Kelchner 1935; Turville-Petre 1958; Ström 1970; Lid 1981; Lönnroth 2002; O'Connor 2012; Heijnen 2013; Heide 2016).

In a detailed and nuanced examination of one of a group of sagas featuring dreams, O'Connor (2012) considers the case of *Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr*. Most of this saga consists of a dream vision which, as O'Connor ably argues, is in fact an embedded *fornaldarsaga*. Comparing *Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr* to other dream texts, as well as such classic texts of oneiric scholarship as the works of Macrobius, O'Connor concludes that *Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr* is an early – indeed, perhaps the earliest – example in Old Norse of a "self-consciously fictional narrative" (2012, 475). *Stjǫrnu-Odda draumr* is believed to derive from the now lost fourteenth-century manuscript **Vatnshyrna* (cf. Stefán Karlsson 1970; O'Connor 2012, 490), as are three other works sometimes referred to as *vitranir* or *draumvitranir* (visions, dream visions) – *Bergbúa þáttr*; *Kumlbúa þáttr* (also known as *Draumr Þorsteins Þorvarðssonar*); and *Draumr Þorsteins Síðu-Hallssonar*.

It is notable that one frequently-cited mythological poem, *Baldrs draumar* (or *Vegtamskviða*), found in AM 748 I 4to, is specifically built around the gods' concern for why Baldr is subject to baleful dreams (*hví væri Baldri ballir draumar*). In order to discover the cause of these troubling night visions, Óðinn rides to the gates of Hel and awakens a seeress who foretells the events of Ragnarǫk. A parallel story, at least as regards dreams, is also relayed in *Gylfaginning* (page 45), which states that Baldr *dreymði drauma stóra ok hættliga um líf sitt* (dreamed great dreams and dangerous to his life). Elements of this same story, including disturbing dreams appearing to Balderus, are also to be found in the otherwise generally quite different version of the Baldr and Hǫðr myth in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus. In Saxo's version, dreams haunt Balderus on two occasions. In the first case, we are told that Balderus is tormented by nightly phantasms in the shape of his wife, Nanna, and that these dreams make him so sick in his legs that he can no longer walk (*Idem laruarum Nannę speciem simulantium continua noctibus intamenta perpessus adeo in aduersam corporis ualitudinem incidit, ut ne pedibus quidem incedere posset*, *Gesta Danorum* 3, 2, 12). Later in the story, Balderus sees in a dream Proserpina, the goddess of death, who prophesies that he will die in three days' time. And as Saxo then adds, "It was no idle vision" (*Nec inane somnii pręsagium fuit*, *Gesta Danorum* 3, 3, 7).

On one point it seems clear we can rest easy in comparing these three narrative traditions: it would seem that for all their many differences, Baldr experiencing menacing oneiric visions about his future is common to each of the three testimonies to the traditions we possess. The key events of this tale, although not the dreams, are indeed referred to elsewhere in Old Norse literature (e.g., *Vǫluspá*, *Hyndluljóð*); however,

this short essay is hardly the place to attempt untangling the complex phylogenetic relationships of these traditions (on which, see especially Lindow 1997; 2002).

Given the key significance of the events the "baleful dreams" of *Baldrs draumar* trigger for the mythology, scholarly attention has understandably focused on Óðinn's subsequent interactions with the *vǫlva* and the information she is able to reveal to him (e.g., Quinn 2002; cf. the essays and literature cited in Gardeła, Bønding, and Pentz 2023). Yet it is notable that this episode with Baldr stands apart in the Old Icelandic repertoire as the one myth in which one of the gods is himself subject to such dreams, a situation not parallelled elsewhere in the eddas. Why should this be so? Is the situation merely the accidental result of which texts have been serendipitously preserved and which have been lost, or is some more significant consideration at work? Mindful of Lindow's savvy caution against overly grand interpretive schemes about this myth complex ("the search for a unified Baldr theory is ultimately too grand an endeavor and should be scaled back to a series of attempts to interpret various texts or traditions," 1997, 38), I want to consider – and suggest approaches to answering – a limited range of issues: How should we understand dreams and dreaming in medieval Scandinavia, and in what ways might this understanding help explain the apparent aberration these dreams present to us and the larger range of otherworldly contacts it presents, especially those involving the goddess Frigg and her messenger, Gná?[1]

Dreams and Dreaming in Medieval Scandinavia

People understandably feel that they know what dreams are, because we all have them, but how were these phenomena understood by others in the past? Dreaming, "[a] series of images, thoughts, and emotions, often with a story-like quality, generated by mental activity during sleep" (OED), appears to be a wide-spread, basic human experience, an integral part of our nature, even if the character and meaning of such activity can be understood differently in different cultures.

Given the pervasiveness of dreaming, it is not so surprising that anthropologists have long interested themselves in the phenomenon. In fact, it would be no overstatement to say that the nineteenth-century beginnings of modern anthropology as a distinct scholarly discipline are intimately tied to the considerations by E. B. Tylor about the relationship of dreams, visions, ghosts, and animism (Tylor 1871, II:94 *et passim*; cf. Saler 1997; Larsen 2013). Since Tylor's early ruminations, many scholars (e.g., Seligman, Lévy-Bruhl, Róheim, Lincoln, Eggan, Tedlock) have focused on dreams, mainly in non-European cultures. In modern Western frameworks, dreams are generally understood, especially since the work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and other psychologists, as being generated by the self for the self, a perspective reified in such familiar constructions to us today as "jag drömde," "ich träumte," or "I dreamed," that is, with the dreamer in the nominative, suggesting perhaps a degree of control and self-generating power over these "images, thoughts, and emotions" (on the Old Norse situation, see, for example,

[1] Portions of this essay were delivered at the 2018 "Living in a Magical World: Inner Lives, 1300–1900" conference at Oxford University.

Ármann Jakobsson 2008 and Crocker 2012). By contrast, in many other cultural traditions, dreams are interpreted as originating outside the dreamer and thus as forming communication from a cultural configuration of *mana* to the dreamer (cf. Künzel 2002).

This perception of dreams as a form of communication coming from an outside power and being delivered to the sleeping dreamer without any conscious effort on the part of the dreamer constitute an important part of the pre-modern Western tradition as well. It is a formulation of dreaming as subliminal, unidirectional communication and stands in opposition to forms of communication between worlds which demand the services of a ritual specialist (in Old Norse, see Gardeła et al. 2023; on the possibility that this too required the agency of intermediary deities, see Mitchell 2014). That the medieval Nordic world understood dreaming as originating among higher powers is an inference one can draw from the North Germanic languages, where dream terminology historically emphasizes the agency of an external force over the dreamer. These expressions were (and are still in some dialects) patterned along the lines of what might be styled in English, "to me was dreamed a dream" (even if accusatives were actually used; see below).

As Cleasby-Vigfusson (1982, 106) explains, "DREYMA, to dream; in Icel. impers. and with a double acc., that of the dreamer and the dream or person appearing; thus, mik dreymdi draum." Or in Söderwall's attempt to explicate this pattern more fully for the East Norse vernaculars, "with the dreamer in the dative or in a form which can be understood as the dative" (*med den drömmande betecknad genom dat.* [*el. en form som kan fattas ss dat.*]; 1884–1973, 203). Thus, West Norse *mik dreymdi* "I dreamed," literally, "dreamed me," or following Söderwall, "[it] was dreamed to me," was parallelled in East Scandinavian dialects by, for example, Old Gutnish *droymdi henni draumbr* (a dream was dreamed to her), Old Swedish *drömpde them badhom en drömber* (a dream was dreamed to them both), and Old Danish *Drømde mik en drøm i nat* (a dream was dreamed to me last night) (cf. Kratschmer and Heijnen 2010; Heijnen 2013).

To say that Norse literature is filled with dreams would be an understatement. Among the many scenes in the sagas where dreams play a role, perhaps the most frequent are those which offer the dreamer forebodings of death and impending disaster – the carefully elaborated, recurring, and increasingly terrible visions of the *draumkonur* (dream-women) in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* are likely one of the best known. Also typical of dream sequences of this sort are those in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* in *Heimskringla* (ch. 82), for example, in which three carefully staged and detailed dreams explicitly filled with forebodings of death and impending disaster in advance of Haraldr's unsuccessful invasion of England are presented. Filled with grim dreamworlds of an immediate future in which troll women slaughter men and great wolves all-too-hungrily consume them, the episode expands the mood of imminent disaster by adding, "Many other dreams were told at this time, and other kinds of visions, mostly dismal ones" (*Margir aðrir draumar váru þá sagðir ok annarskonar fyrirburðir, ok flestir daprligir* [178]).

And dreams are also employed in intriguing ways that draw on ancient tradition in service of contemporary events: in *Íslendinga saga*, the famous pagan heroine, Guðrún

Gjúkadóttir, appears on multiple occasions in dreams which the sixteen-year-old Jóreiðr has. On one occasion, the two engage in a conversation specifically addressing their heathen and Christian differences. This irruption of the past into the present, to use Kaplan's fine locution (2011), has been something of a puzzle to readers for some time, but was considered in depth by Meulengracht Sørensen (1988) who concluded that this dream tale could be explained by the ability of such pagan heroic materials to reflect, and even suggest solutions to, contemporary issues.

An important model for medieval Nordic literature, dream stories in the Bible are often styled in similar terms, with angels variously appearing, showing, announcing, and relaying news to the dreamer, locutions that direct the reader's attention to the agency of God in directing events. This is an especially common way of narrating dreaming traditions in the Hebrew Bible and the book of Matthew (and in texts derived from them). For example, Matthew 2:13 reads in the Vulgate, *Qui cum recessissent, ecce angelus Domini apparuit in somnis Joseph, dicens*… and in the English of the King James translation, "And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying…" A homiletic paraphrase of this passage on the slaughter of the innocents, *Jn die sancorum innocentium* (< Matthew 2:13), reads, "*Sva segir Math*eus *guðfpialla* maðr. *at engil drotens vitraðefe Ioféph í dræumi ok mælte…"* (so says Matthew the Evangelist, that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said…; *Gamal norsk homiliebok*: 50). On the other hand, despite its tendency to emphasize this oneiric power dynamic, the Vulgate is no stranger to forms comparable to "I saw a dream" and frequently uses them as well (e.g., *vidi somnium, vidi somnia, vidi in somnis*).

A key narrative function of biblical dream sequences is evident when wise individuals capable of understanding and correctly interpreting dreams are revealed, perhaps most famously in such scenes as when the dreams of the pharaoh are explained by Joseph (Genesis 41) or those of Nebuchadnezzar are interpreted by Daniel (Daniel 2). The ability to interpret dreams held an important place in Classical and other ancient societies, exemplified in the writings of Artemidorous (2nd c. C.E.) and Macrobius (c. 360–422), so that by the Middle Ages, there existed in northern European scholarly – and quite possibly in popular – cultures a substantial hybrid of pre-Christian traditions of dreaming, Classical oneirology, and Christian theology, including patristic writings (cf. the surveys and comments in Wittmer-Butsch 1990; Kruger 1992; Burke 1997; Schmitt 1998 [1994]; and Argüelles and McNamara 2002).

Important for our understanding of dreams as such in the medieval Norse world was the importation and development of a distinct genre of visionary literature (cf. Heide 2016) which further expanded the use and perception of dream worlds in medieval Scandinavia. The influence in this arena of such well-known texts as the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, for instance, may have played a very significant role in how certain episodes of Old Icelandic literature took shape, as has been suggested on several occasions (e.g., Turville-Petre 1953, 136; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971, 12–16; cf. the surveys in Roberts 2006 and Wellendorf 2013; 2017). And, of course, the northern world developed and preserved its own extraordinary contributions to vision literature in variously borrowed, original, and traditional forms (e.g., *Visio Tnugdali*, the *Revelaciones*

of St Birgitta, *Vǫluspá*). By noting this important ecclesiastical role in conceptualizing and presenting dreams, I am not looking to mount an argument in favor of the "Great" tradition over the so-called "Little" tradition (cf. Redfield 1956), but merely acknowledging that in the learned circles of the Nordic Middle Ages many interpretive frameworks and many sources of information existed, and in considering our texts, we should try to appreciate all of them (see, for example, the model in Boje Mortensen 2006).

That dream literature had its role to play in political and other worldly matters is a theme which has been widely accepted by a variety of authorities (e.g., Glendinning 1966; 1974; Miller 1986). Exploring dreams principally as a literary device in the hands of writers of the family sagas, Lönnroth (2002) argues that dreams in the sagas provide one of three narrative functions: 1) to predict future events; 2) to show a supernatural power's influence over earthly events; and 3) to develop the dreamer's character in the saga. In conjunction with this last point, Lönnroth comments that "…dreams in family sagas have an effect on narrative structure that is both stabilizing and unsettling: they make us glimpse an existential or metaphysical pattern behind the events, and this pattern tends to counteract the rationality and the apparent realism of the saga as a whole" (2002, 456).

Baldr's "Baleful Dreams" Considered

How then are we to understand the role of prophetic dreams in the myth of Baldr? At one level, it would be sensible to maintain with Lönnroth, appreciating that his model is intended to address the family sagas specifically, that dreams represent a remarkable narrative tool for authors of all sorts. And how true this point would appear to be for the West Norse version of the Baldr myth. It is, for example, difficult to imagine anyone reading or hearing *Baldrs draumar* (especially an audience member from within that tradition) who would fail to sense the central haunting prolepsis it offers, suggestions of the coming apocalypse, all triggered by something as seemingly ephemeral as dreaming. I, for one, am happy to agree that this point of view must be part of the answer, at least narratologically, even if I do not believe that it is the entire solution with respect to these events in the mythology. Still, one explanation to the question might be to argue that the *ballir draumar* ("baleful dreams") Baldr experiences are important insofar as – perhaps even "only insofar as" – they represent in the mythology as literature a brilliant narrative instrument used wisely by the poet. And after all, against the other Norse deities, who we often meet as bloviating, fornicating, pugnacious, inebriated, peripatetic, riddling, and intriguing figures, no one would deny that the West Norse presentation of Baldr – apart from these dreams and the sequence of events that they initiate – makes him appear to be a comparatively dull and passive soteriological figure.

Also significant is the fact that Baldr's "baleful dreams" represent an unusual situation, that is, that a god should himself be the recipient of a dream would appear to be a marked circumstance within the mythology. Thus, a key element of the myth is the seeming paradox represented by a god receiving a dream, elsewhere in the communicative system a bestowal made by superior powers to humans and other lesser

recipients. Thus, against the view that Baldr's dreams are standard fare within the mythology (e.g., "Baldr's dreams are like all the other dreams in early Germanic literature," Liberman 2004, 48), I think the circumstance of this god experiencing dreams is unusual and meant to be viewed as unusual. In fact, it is not difficult to see in it a circumstance paralleled in the mythology by the similarly baffling image of a god sacrificing himself to himself, *siálfr siálfom mér*, as Óðinn describes his self-sacrifice in *Hávamál* 138, an act which has been interpreted as a form of religious reflexivity (cf. Patton 2009, 213–36). The phenomenon of the god Baldr being disturbed by "baleful dreams" should be understood as being connected to, or meant to signal, a much more significant and complicated aspect of the mythology, assuming, as I do, that mythological systems were, when they were a vital part of the society, meant to be coherent.

A poem that casts important light on this point is *Vǫluspá*, a well-known poem in the tradition, an eddic composition in which Óðinn also seeks wisdom from a *vǫlva*. Many details about forthcoming events are revealed to him by the seeress, including Baldr's fate – but without any mention of dreams in the poem (cf. the closely related account in *Gylfaginning* where they play a key role). In the verses leading to her comments on Baldr, the seeress notes that she saw widely about over every world (*sá hon vítt oc um vítt / of verold hveria*; *Vǫluspá* 29), after which she describes the gathering of valkyries and then reports,

> Ec sá Baldri, blóðgom tívor,
> Óðins barni, ørlǫg fólgin;
> (*Vǫluspá* 31)

The fact that Baldr's name, and thus also the appositives which follow it (*blóðgom tívor, Óðins barni*), are in the dative has led generations of translators to propose texts like Caroline Larrington's fine locution, "I saw *for* Baldr, *for* the bloody god, / Odin's child, his fate in store" (emphases added). The phrasing underscores the fact that the *vǫlva* Óðinn has awakened and engages in this special "seeing," not in general terms but specifically in order to bring the information "from hell" (*ór helio*; *Baldrs draumar* 6), in Óðinn's words, on behalf of, or in order to warn or otherwise benefit Baldr.

Baldrs draumar opens with the gods in consultation over Baldr's dread dreams and Óðinn then riding to the gates of Hel and visiting the grave of a dead seeress until she reluctantly rises and speaks "corpse words" (*nás orð*; v. 4), eventually revealing key aspects of the Baldr myth. Similarly, *Vǫluspá* opens with the seeress specifying to Óðinn the task she has before her, saying,

> vildo, at ec, Valfǫðr, vel fyrtelia
> forn spioll fira, þau er fremst um man.
> (*Vǫluspá* 1)
> Father of the slain, you wished me well to declare
> living beings' ancient stories, those I remember from furthest back. (Larrington transl.)

Not surprisingly, given the similarities of the scenes, debate has swirled around the possible connection of these two poems as regards content, style, age, and origin, bringing, one suspects, even exasperated experts to the point where the poems are described simply as "closely related" (Turville-Petre 1964, 109). But an obvious question that occurs to anyone comparing these two poems is whether they are meant to represent two different mythological events involving two different *vǫlur* or a single mythological event with just one *vǫlva*, but represented differently with differing emphases in the two poems.

Both poems reflect, even help establish, one could imagine, ritual models for discovering and revealing future events through divine communication, underscoring, as Bønding notes, that "ritual communication with superhuman agencies is radically different from ordinary communication" (2023, 40; cf. Schjødt 2020). I have suggested elsewhere (Mitchell 2014) that what we may witness in poems of this sort and in such famous texts as *Eiríks saga rauða* is a form of communication between worlds, where Frigg, who "knows all fates," uses the agency of the *ásynja* Gná to transmit news from other worlds to humans, that is, the system referred to when Snorri writes *hana* [*Gná*] *sendir Frigg í ymsa heima at eyrindum sínum* (Frigg sends her [Gná] into various worlds to carry out her business; *Gylfaginning*, 30). This point is further addressed elsewhere in *Snorra edda*, when Þriði notes that Frigg knows people's fates, although she does not say what they are (*ok veit hon ørlǫg manna þótt hon segi eigi spár; Gylfaginning*, 21). Immediately thereafter, Þriði quotes *Locasenna* 29, in which Freyja observes that Frigg knows all fates even if *she does not reveal them herself* (*ørlǫg Frigg / hugg ec at ǫll viti, / þótt hon siálfgi segi*) ("Frigg knows, I think, all fate / *though she herself does not speak out*").

As moderns looking to understand this bygone world, we are likely more comfortable imagining a *seiðr*-form of otherwordly communication than we are with dreaming – that is, with a ritual specialist behaving in seemingly proscribed ways, rather than the (to us) less ordered and more haphazard dreamworld. Presumably it is easier for us to envision ritual than the more elusive information channel represented by Nordic understandings of dreaming. But it is perhaps not too far-fetched to imagine that to a tradition bearer these modes of communication would have been understood to overlap and share many features. And, after all, if any pattern precipitates out of the West Norse Baldr myth, it seems to be that "baleful dreams" lead to the use of *seiðr*.

Bibliography

Primary Sources (only those quoted)

Baldrs draumar = *Edda,* 277–79.

Edda = Neckel, Gustav and Hans Kuhn, eds. 1983. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. Carl Winter Universitätsverlag. English transl. Carolyne Larrington, ed. 2014. *The Poetic Edda*. 2nd rev. ed. Oxford University Press.

Gesta Danorum = Karsten Friis-Jensen, ed. 2005. Saxo Grammaticus. *Gesta Danorum: Danmarkshistorien.* Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab/Gads forlag. English

transl. Peter Fisher. 1980. Saxo Grammaticus. *The History of the Danes: II. Commentary*. D. S. Brewer.

Gylfaginning = Anthony Faulkes, ed. 2005. Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning.* 2nd ed. Viking Society for Northern Research. University College London.

Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar in Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 1979 [1951]. Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla III,* 68–202. Íslenzk fornrit 28. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Hávamál = *Edda,* 17–44.

Jn die sancorum innocentium in Gustav Indrebø, ed. 1931. *Gamal norsk homiliebok: Cod. AM 619 4* [The Old Norwegian Homily Book: Cod. AM 619 4to]. Skrifter utgjevne for Kjeldeskriftfondet 54. Jacob Dybwad.

Läke- och örte-böcker = Klemming. Gustaf E., ed. 1883–86. *Läke- och örte-böcker från Sveriges medeltid* [Medical and herb books from medieval Sweden]. Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapets Samlingar 26. P. A. Norstedt & söner.

Locasenna = *Edda,* 96–110.

Vǫluspá = *Edda,* 1–16.

Vulgate = Fischer, Bonifatio and Robert Weber, eds. 1983. *Biblia sacra, iuxta Vulgatam versionem.* 3rd rev. ed. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Secondary Sources

Argüelles, Alexander and John McNamara. 2002. "Dreams and Dream Poetry." In *Medieval Folklore: A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*, edited by Carl Lindahl, John McNamara and John Lindow, 107–10. Oxford University Press.

Ármann Jakobsson. 2008. "Laxdæla Dreaming: A Saga Heroine Invents Her Own Life." *Leeds Studies in English* 39: 33–51.

Bønding, Sophie. 2023. "The *vǫlva*'s Ritual Repertoire: Between Magic and Divination." In *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*, edited by Leszek Gardeła, Sophie Bønding and Peter Pentz, 27–60. Oxbow.

Boje Mortensen, Lars. 2006. "Den formative dialog mellem latinsk og folkesproglig litteratur ca 600–1250: Udkast til en dynamisk model" [The formative dialogue between Latin and vernacular literature ca. 600–1250: A draft for a dynamic model]. In *Reykholt som makt- og lærdomssenter i den islandske og nordiske kontekst* [Reykholt as a center of power and learning in the Icelandic and Nordic context], edited by Else Mundal, 229–71. Rit 3. Snorrastofa.

Burke, Peter. 1997. "The Cultural History of Dreams." In *Varieties of Cultural History*, edited by Peter Burke, 23–42. Polity Press.

Crocker, Christopher. 2012. "All I Do the Whole Night Through: On the Dreams of Gísli Súrsson." *Scandinavian Studies* 84, no. 2: 143–62.

Cleasby, Richard and Gudbrand Vigfusson, eds. 1982 [1957]. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. William Craigie. The Clarendon Press.

Gardeła, Leszek, Sophie Bønding, and Peter Pentz, eds. 2023. *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*. Oxbow.

Glendinning, R. J. 1966. "Saints, Sinners, and the Age of the Sturlungs: Two Dreams From 'Íslendinga Saga.'" *Scandinavian Studies* 38, no. 2: 83–97.

———. 1974. *Träume und Vorbedeutung in der Íslendinga saga Sturla Thordarsons: Eine Form- und Stiluntersuchung*. Kanadische Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur 8. Herbert Lang.

Gunnell, Terry. 2023. "Folklore and Prophecy." In *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*, edited by Leszek Gardeła, Sophie Bønding and Peter Pentz, 135–52. Oxbow.

Haeckel, Margarete. 1934. *Die Darstellung und Funktion des Traumes in der isländischen Familiensaga*. Hergestellt bei H. Proctor.

Heide, Eldar. 2016. "The Term *leizla* in Old Norse Vision Literature – Contrasting Imported and Indigenous Genres." *Scripta Islandica* 67: 37–63.

Heijnen, Adriënne. 2013. *The Social Life of Dreams: A Thousand Years of Negotiated Meanings in Iceland*. European Studies in Culture and Policy 12. Lit.

Henzen, Wilhelm. 1890. *Über die Träume in der altnordischen Sagalitteratur*. G. Fock.

Kaplan, Merrill. 2011. *Thou Fearful Guest: Addressing the Past in Four Tales in* Flateyjarbók. FF Communications 301. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Kelchner, Georgia Dunham. 1935. *Dreams in Old Norse Literature and their Affinities in Folklore*. The University Press.

Kratschmer, Alexandra and Adriënne Heijnen. 2010. "Revelative Evidentiality in European Languages: Linguistic Marking and its Anthropological Background." In *Linguistic Realization of Evidentiality in European Languages*, edited by Gabriele Diewald and Elena Smirnova, 331–68. De Gruyter Mouton.

Kruger, Steven F. 1992. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 14. Cambridge University Press.

Künzel, Rudi. 2002. "Medieval Dreams: A Sample of Historical and Psychoanalytical Criticism." *Psychoanalytische Perspectieven* 20, no. 2: 215–33.

Larsen, Timothy. 2013. "E. B. Tylor, Religion and Anthropology." *The British Journal for the History of Science* 46, no. 3: 467–85.

Liberman, Anatoly. 2004. "Some Controversial Aspects of the Myth of Baldr." *Alvíssmál* 11: 17–54.

Lid, Nils. 1981 [1956–78]. "Draumar" [Dreams]. In *Kultur-historisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* [Cutural-historical dictionary for the Nordic Middle Ages], 299–302. Rosenkilde og Bagger.

Lindow, John. 1997. *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods: Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology*. FF Communications 262. Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

———. 2002. "The Tears of the Gods: A Note on the Death of Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 101, no. 2: 155–69.

Lönnroth, Lars. 2002. "Dreams in the Sagas." *Scandinavian Studies* 74, no. 4: 455–64.

Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben. 1988. "Guðrún Gjúkadóttir in Miðjumdalr: Zur Aktualität nordischer Heldensage im Island des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts." In *Heldensage und Heldendichtung im Germanischen*, edited by Heinrich Beck, 183–96. Walter de Gruyter.

Miller, William Ian. 1986. "Dreams, Prophecy, and Sorcery: Blaming the Secret Offender in Medieval Iceland." *Scandinavian Studies* 58: 112–22.

Mitchell, Stephen A. 2014. "Gudinnan Gná" [The goddess Gná]. *Saga och Sed*: 25–41. [Available in English in Stephen A. Mitchell. 2023. *Old Norse Folklore: Tradition, Innovation, and Performance in Medieval Scandinavia*, 103–23. Cornell University Press].

O'Connor, Ralph. 2012. "Astronomy and Dream Visions in Late Medieval Iceland: *Stjörnu-Odda draumr* and the Emergence of Norse Legendary Fiction." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111, no. 4: 474–512.

OED = *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "dream (n.2), sense 1.a," DOI: 10.1093/OED/4097186867%20September%202023.

Patton, Kimberley C. 2009. *Religion of the Gods: Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity*. Oxford University Press.

Price, Neil S. 2019 [2002]. *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. 2nd rev. and expanded ed. Oxbow Books.

Quinn, Judy. 2002. "Dialogue with a *vǫlva*: *Vǫluspá, Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð*." In *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, edited by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington, 245–74. Routledge.

Redfield, Robert. 1956. *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilization*. University of Chicago Press.

Roberts, Jonjo. 2006. "Gregory the Great's *Dialogi* and the Narration of Dreams in Medieval Icelandic Literature." *Quaestio Insularis* 7: 138–60.

Sävborg, Daniel. 2009. "Avstånd, gräns och förundran: Möten med de övernaturliga i islänningasagan" [Distance, boundary and wonder: Encounters with the supernatural in the sagas of Icelanders]. In *Greppaminni: Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni sjötugum* [*Greppaminni*: Festschrift in Honour of Vésteinn Ólason on the occasion of his 70th birthday], edited by Margrét Eggertsdóttir et al., 323–49. Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag.

Saler, Benson. 1997. "E. B. Tylor and the Anthropology of Religion." *Marburg Journal of Religion* 2, no. 1: 1–6.

Schjødt, Jens Peter. 2020. "Various Ways of Communicating." In *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Vol. II: Social, Geographical, and Historical Contexts, and Communication between Worlds,* edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén, 589–642. Brepols.

Schmitt, Jean-Claude. 1998 [1994]. *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*. University of Chicago Press.

Söderwall, Knut F. and Karl Gustav Ljunggren, eds. 1884–1973. *Ordbok öfver svenska medeltids-språket (& Supplement)* [Dictionary of the medieval Swedish language (& supplement)]. Svenska Fornskrift-Sällskapets Samlingar 27. Berlingska.

Stefán Karlsson. 1970. "Um Vatnshyrnu" [About *Vatnshyrna*]. *Opuscula* 4: 279–303.

Ström, Åke. 1970. "Formes de mystique dans le Nord préchrétien: Étude psychologique." In *Mysticism: Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Mysticism held at Åbo on the 7th–9th September, 1968*, edited by Sven S. Hartman and Carl-Martin Edsman, 220–48. Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 5. Almqvist & Wiksell.

Turville-Petre, E. O. G. 1953. *The Origins of Icelandic Literature*. The Clarendon Press.

———. 1958. "Dreams in Icelandic Literature." *Folklore* 69: 93–111.

Turville-Petre, Gabriel. 1964. *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Tylor, Edward B. 1871. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*. J. Murray.

Wellendorf, Jonas. 2013. "Lærdomslitteratur" [Learned literature]. In *Handbok i norrøn filologi* [Handbook of Norse philology]. 2nd edition by Odd Einar Haugen, 302–55. Fagbokforlaget.

———. 2017. "Ecclesiastical Literature and Hagiography." In *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, edited by Ármann Jakobsson et al., 48–58. Routledge.

Wittmer-Butsch, Maria Elisabeth. 1990. *Zur Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum im Mittelalter*. Medium Aevum Quotidianum. Sonderband 1. Medium Aevum Quotidianum.

THE PERFORMANCE OF *HÁRBARÐSLJÓÐ* – BUT ISN'T THAT YOUR LINE?

Frog*

Terry Gunnell has been a driving force in the turn to performance in the study of Old Norse poetry, ritual, and religion. I met him at the end of my first year as a graduate student at an International Saga Conference, back when I was immersed in philology rather than folklore. On Friday night, I wandered into the hotel at around four in the morning, where I found Terry chatting with old friends in the lobby over a flask of whisky, and he invited me to join them. The ensuing conversation inspired me to read *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (1995) – most of it from a dogeared photocopy while stranded overnight in Stockholm's airport. As I moved into Folklore Studies, I learned to appreciate that Gunnell's work has shaped approaches to performance in Old Norse materials in a distinctive way. Performance-oriented approaches elsewhere were aimed at rethinking traditions as text through contexts and variation or practice, which gradually advanced into meaning production (e.g. Bauman 1975; Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975; Foley 1995; Honko 2000). Gunnell's background in drama structured his approach to performance, giving priority to settings and staging, with attention to sensorial perceptions and the experiences of those involved (e.g. 1995; 2001; 2003; 2013).

At a recent conference in Copenhagen,[1] Gunnell asked me to help him illustrate the possible dynamics of *Hárbarðsljóð*'s performance. In the poem, Þórr arrives at a sound and calls the ferryman on the far shore to fetch him. The ferryman, who calls himself Hárbarðr, is commonly accepted to be Óðinn, and their dialogue advances through boasts, jibes, and insults, until Þórr gives up and walks away. This encounter between Óðinn and Þórr is not attested elsewhere, although insult exchanges with a ferryman over water appear to have deep roots in the Germanic tradition (Clover 1979). Gunnell proposed that the poem was traditionally performed by two players at either end of a

* Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.

[1] Early Germanic Poetics and Religion from Linguistic and Comparative Perspectives, 18th–19th September 2023.

hall, reproducing the distance separating Þórr and Hárbarðr. Raising a household hammer, Gunnell bellowed *Hrbl*[2] 23. Without forewarning, I answered from the back of the room, my scarf tied over one eye, and we proceeded thus for the next sixteen turns of dialogue. We followed the standard edition, which prefers the text of GKS 2365 4to but follows the speaker notation of AM 748 I a 4to. However, if we had stuck to the script of GKS 2365 4to, Terry would've had to bite his tongue at *Hrbl* 35, because I would have taken his line.

A Genre of Drama?

A significant but little-noticed contribution of Gunnell's study concerns eddic genres. 'Genre' has long been bandied about in discussions of this poetry (e.g. Heusler 1923), but these discussions have been characterized by three central problems. First, 'eddic' has been taken for granted as a macro-genre since the seventeenth-century (cf. Haukur Þorgeirsson and Teresa Dröfn Njarðvík 2017). Second, researchers tend to conflate medieval labels of poems like *senna* ('insult contest') or *grátr* ('lament') with the genre of a poem itself (cf. Bampi et al. 2020).[3] Third, eddic scholarship has built on the literary concept of genre, reducing the corpus to text-scripts. At its most sophisticated, this type of approach normally conceives of genre as analogous to a Saussurian sign – a signifier/signified relation (Saussure 1916 [1967]) of form/content or form/content-equivalent (e.g. Todorov 1977, esp. 248). The two-part model is not well suited for oral traditions because it isolates verbal utterance from social practices (Frog 2016). Gunnell threw a wrench into such approaches by demonstrating a clear divide between at least two groups of eddic texts and their links to different types of practices. He built from a structural approach to the eddic corpus divided into monologues, dialogues, and third-person narratives (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1962, 200–2). He combined this with observations of *ljóðaháttr*'s formal differences in language and meter (Noreen 1926, 41–2) and exclusive use for direct speech (Philpotts 1920, 26), developing Bertha S. Philpotts arguments for traditional drama (1920).[4] Observing that marginal notations were used to indicate changes of speaker exclusively in *ljóðaháttr* dialogic poems, Gunnell showed that such notations were not used in contemporary manuscripts containing theological dialogues, but that they are found for contemporary dramatic works elsewhere, supporting his interpretation that they were seen as dramatic works (1995, ch. 4). More recent research shows that the *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttr* meters evolved contrasting rhythmic tendencies (Russom 2009). This accounts for why formulae are often specific to one meter and it points to marked differences in how the lines in each were customarily performed. For a contemporary audience, *ljóðaháttr* may have sounded no

[2] Text abbreviations are used to refer to the current standard numbering of passages of the text established in Neckel 1914.

[3] On representations of lament in eddic poetry, see Stepanova and Frog 2019, 104–7; Frog and Stepanova 2025; on genres' metadiscursive representations of verbal art, see Tarkka 2013; Frog 2022, 183–6, 199–200, 206.

[4] The exception is *Vafþrúðnismál* 5, which Gunnell (1995, 186) states "might be considered to be an addition to the original poem" (see also Frog 2021, 71).

less different from *fornyrðislag* than *dróttkvætt*, making the longstanding tendency to view Old Norse poetry in binary terms of 'eddic' and 'skaldic' not only oversimplified but potentially misleading and inappropriate (Leslie-Jacobsen 2017; Frog 2024a). In this light, treating *Lokasenna* and *Hymiskviða* as representing the same genre is comparable to claiming the same about Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* on the grounds that both are old, long, and metrically uncomplicated poems.

Hárbarðsljóð is among the eddic dialogues with marginal speaker notation – I refrain from calling it a 'poem,' since it may represent a speech exchange co-produced by two performers with corresponding variation rather than a single, extended, and coherent versified (or equivalent) utterance, to which 'poem' would normally refer. Formally, *Hárbarðsljóð* is an outlier in the corpus owing to "its radical formal disharmony" (Clover 1979, 124). Other eddic dialogues are metrically regular, with usually one full passage per turn (which in *ljóðaháttr* is usually two long lines each paired with a *Vollzeile*), with a few examples of several consecutive passages attributed to a single speaker (e.g. *Skírnismál*). Formal variations occur, but they are limited in number, and some may be attributable to the documentation context, like the half-length passages in *Vafþrúðnismál* (Frog 2021, 60–72). In contrast, turns in *Hárbarðsljóð* tend to be irregular in both meter and duration. Several turns seem to lack meter entirely, and 39 of the 60 turns are half a normal passage or shorter. *Hárbarðsljóð* remained at the periphery of research through most of the twentieth century because, as a 'poem,' it looks rather crappy. Considered instead as representing the verbal component of some form of traditional practice, *Hárbarðsljóð* is interesting in a number of respects.

Having eventually been trained as a Finnish folklorist, the puzzle that hooks me is not the dramatic arrangement or situational reception of performance. For me, it is the riddle of how the verbal art of the poem would work and vary in the oral tradition, and what the manuscript text may suggest about that tradition or its documentation. *Hárbarðsljóð*'s unique irregularity raises the question of whether it represents a different genre from *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Skírnismál*, and *Alvíssmál*, a different local tradition (cf. *Atlamál in grœnlenzku*), or perhaps a difference in the dictation situation or how a presenter engaged with it. The prospect of something unusual having occurred in the dictation process opens questions about additional impacts, such omissions, additions, or mixed organization.

That turns were not of regular duration appears responsible for the differences between the two medieval exemplars. The marginal speaker notations of GKS 2365 4to appear as in-text speaker notations in AM 748 I a 4to, where the text is only preserved from *Hrbl* 19.7, but its notations are followed for the division of passages in modern editions. GKS 2365 4to presents *Hrbl* 3.1–4 and 3.5–8 as two passages and *Hrbl* 35–6 and 59–60 as a single turn each. The copyist of GKS 2365 4to follows (presumably) his exemplar very closely in terms of orthography and abbreviations, whereas a copyist in the transmission of AM 748 I a 4to appears responsible for a number of interventions

reflecting skill in the poetry.[5] I thus consider it more likely that this scribe moved the marginal notations into the main text for easier reading. He also made interventions elsewhere when he considered there to be an error, although he did not add missing passages (Frog 2021, 65–8), so he may be responsible for adding breaks after *Hrbl* 35 and 59. The post-medieval copies are based on GKS 2365 4to until the end of the seventeenth century,[6] increasing the variation in breaks between passages, whether through interventions or accidents.[7] However, these later variations are in the visible spacing that divides passages within a received 'poem' as a continuous series of lines. If the medieval text had been used as a script for a two-player performance, any mixing or ambiguity of speaker turns may have motivated users to mark the breaks in the margins of an early copy. And if *Hárbarðsljóð* represents a multi-player performance tradition, this also has implications for variation in the oral text.

The Irregularity of the Verse

Following a short prose statement, *Hárbarðsljóð* is conventionally edited as 60 passages, each corresponding to one turn of speech. Against the backdrop of the eddic corpus, these passages look formally chaotic, or at least very different from other eddic texts. This aspect of *Hárbarðsljóð* may be attributable to:

a) Manuscript transmission
b) The documentation process
c) An oral tradition behind the written text
d) Some combination of these

Manuscript transmission may have introduced some problems into the text at an early stage. For example, if GKS 2365 4to's presentation of *Hrbl* 35–6 reflects the original documentation of the text, a turn of Þórr between *Hrbl* 34 and 35–6 may have been lost already in the exemplar shared with AM 748 I a 4to. However, the formal irregularity is more or less evenly distributed through the text, making (*a*) improbable. *Hrbl* 34 and 35–6 (Þórr being named in *Hrbl* 36) may thus have been considered two consecutive turns by Hárbarðr (cf. *Alv* 8–9) between which Þórr is silent (cf. *Þkv* 18ff.).

The abundant verse quotations in Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* warn against assuming that all eddic poetry was written from dictation rather than personal knowledge (cf. Gísli Sigurðsson 1998, xx). However, internal textual evidence suggests that at least *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál*, and *Alvíssmál* were written from dictation (Frog 2021).

[5] I differentiate this copyist, whom I suspect was responsible for the exemplar shared with AM 748 II 4to or its antecedent, from the copyist of AM 748 I a 4to itself, who appears attributable with numerous errors that point to a lack of skill or carelessness.

[6] Árni Magnússon acquired AM 748 4to in 1691 (Handrit.is, AM 748 I a 4to). I find no evidence that AM 748 I a 4to was known to copyists before that time; the medieval text behind the seventeenth-century *Longer Baldrs draumar* (Frog 2023) derives from an independent exemplar.

[7] E.g. AM 738 4to from 1680 has no break after *Hrbl* 3.4, 21, 30, 40, and 45, and added breaks after *Hrbl* 22.3 (uncertain), 59.2, and the end of 59.

Dictation always impacts on the recorded text (Ready 2019, ch. 3). The duration of speaker turns in texts like *Lokasenna* or *Alvíssmál* may therefore appear more regular than would be customary in a performance as a function of dictation structuring the rhythm of delivery. For example, dictation in units of one long line followed by a *Vollzeile* would be natural for *ljóðaháttr*'s syntax, practical for a scribe, and followed by a pause of perhaps one to two minutes for transcription. This type of interruptive practice is likely related to the half-length turns in the preserved version of *Vafþrúðnismál*,[8] whether by accident, owing to thinking ahead during the pause, or impatience at the interruptive tedium of a dictation process (Frog 2021, 60–72). An interruptive dictation process may also produce other types of blunders, such as transitioning to a passage customarily performed as part of a different text (cf. *Fm* 12–5 and Frog 2021, 77–8). Mixing of meter has been interpreted in some cases as meaningful (Quinn 1992), although it might also be an incidental outcome of integrating pre-composed passages with independent backgrounds. Such transpositions are organic to an oral tradition with relatively stable verbal texts, while *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* illustrates that it could also occur at a writing table, whether from written exemplars or personal knowledge.

Hárbarðsljóð's formal irregularity is so inconsistent with the rest of the corpus that one or more situational variables would have to be markedly different to produce it. The situation in which dictation was taken is unlikely to have varied so much in thirteenth-century Iceland,[9] whereas an individual's engagement with the dictation process might vary considerably. That Old Germanic poetry is predominantly written as *metrical* text – that, for someone familiar with the poetics, the written words can be read directly as metrical lines – is not automatic. In successful dictation, meter often becomes more salient and regular, but performers may also slip in and out of paraphrase and the summarization of content, or they may simply become confused and frustrated at the slow and interruptive process (Ready 2019, ch. 3). *Hárbarðsljóð*'s formal irregularity could thus reflect the dictation process. The presenter may have drifted in and out of metrical forms. If *Hárbarðsljóð* was customarily performed by two people, dictation could result in only the semantically central units being presented. The text's marked uses of verbal repetition, semantic and syntactic parallelism, and phonic patterning, might then reflect the formal features that the presenter considered central or emblematic, giving them priority over meter.

This hypothesis plays out well for some passages but does not work for the whole text. For instance, *Hrbl* 1 and 2 are each only a single long line of *ljóðaháttr*. The structure of *ljóðaháttr* predicts that a *Vollzeile* would accompany each of these at least in other local traditions, with the possibility that it was simply omitted here, or that these are only the essential lines of a full-passage call and response (cf. *Skm* 17–8). The series of short turns

[8] Cf. the completions of *Vm* 27, 31, and 40–1 in Lbs 636 4to from 1750–60, where the base text is a copy of *The Shorter Vafþrúðnismál* (Frog 2024b) compiled with one or more other versions as well as interventions (e.g. *Sól* is systematically exchanged for *Sunna*).

[9] In contrast, the affordability of paper in the nineteenth century and practices of elites wandering the countryside to get peasants to sing and tell them things could produce exceptional dictation situations, e.g. literally taking dictation on the road.

numbered *Hrbl* 31–6 might similarly be viewed as a presenter wearying of the dictation process. *Hrbl* 36 in particular looks like something is missing, since it is just the boasting formula *Hvat vanntu meðan, Þórr?* ('What were you doing then, Þórr?'), a prompt without new information or specific connection to what preceded it (cf. *Hrbl* 17). However, this series of exchanges is a digression from Hárbarðr's statement in *Hrbl* 30 and the short turns change the pace of the dialogue, of which *Hrbl* 36 may be seen as a conclusion. Expanding each of these turns to a full *ljóðaháttr* passage would considerably slow the pace of the section. The hypothesis seems to run aground on *Hrbl* 38 if this is accepted as Hárbarðr's interruption of Þórr's boast in *Hrbl* 37+39. Such an interruption is not reconcilable with a principle that each turn of dialogue should be a full passage. Consequently, the principles governing turns of dialogue in *Hárbarðsljóð* appear to be different from those observed in other dialogic texts.

The contrasts between *Hárbarðljóð* and the *ljóðaháttr* dialogues are at an underlying structural level. The structural differences point to either a difference in genre (i.e. practice) or a background in a local or regional tradition very different from other eddic texts. Marked differences in local practices in Iceland are quite possible owing to its immigration history: people would have brought diverse local forms of traditions from around Scandinavia and potentially beyond. *Hárbarðsljóð* might thus reflect a tradition linked to a particular kin group or from a different Quarter, or even from outside of Iceland (cf. *Atlamál in grœnlenzku*). Such a background makes it unclear whether the variation in the metrical form and length of passages reflects that background or the text was also significantly impacted by a dictation process (some impact being inevitable, and more likely if the presenter normally only presented one of the two roles). However, if the performance practice were formally more flexible, the wording of turns was also quite likely more variable, in which case *Hárbarðsljóð*'s text may be deceptively static.

The Contents and Structure

Focusing on a *senna*-type model for the dialogue, Clover feels that *Hárbarðsljóð*'s "outer design is by Eddic standards bold and clear," formed of *Hrbl* 1–13 as a prelude, *Hrbl* 14–54 as the "central exchange or flyting proper," and then *Hrbl* 55–60 as its conclusion (1979, 130). Clover's focus is on a *senna*-type model for the dialogue, and she observes the "challenge formula," in which the speaker concludes his turn with the question of what the other was doing, is bound to a four-part sequence organization that recurs five times in the dialogue (Table 1):

a) Hárbarðr concludes his utterance with the formula
b) Þórr makes an extended boast concerning martial prowess, concluding with the formula
c) Hárbarðr responds with a boast concerned with sexual prowess without the formula
d) Þórr responds with a single line (which, in the case of *Hrbl* 25, Clover interprets as a faulty line: 1979, 134)

However, the four-part sequence organization does not bring the structure of the 'flyting proper' into focus. The flyting cycle repeats consecutively three times (*Hrbl* 14–25), but is then interrupted by Hárbarðr's insult about Þórr being stuffed in a mitten and Þórr's expression of anger (*Hrbl* 26–7). The fourth cycle is then followed by a digression (*Hrbl* 32–5) before reaching the fifth.[10]

Table 1. Clover's four-part sequence linked to use of the boasting formula.

Speaker	**Number of lines per speaker**				
	***Hrbl* 14–17**	***Hrbl* 18–21**	***Hrbl* 22–25**	***Hrbl* 28–31**	***Hrbl* 36–41**
a. Hárb. challenge	4	12+formula	2+formula	2+formula	formula
b. Þórr boast+challenge	6+formula	8+formula	8+formula	8+formula	10+formula
c. Hárb. boast	8	7	7	6	4
d. Þórr	1	1	3	1	1

Although Clover's observations shed light on structures operating in the text, a difficulty is that the parts of the dialogue are imbricated. For example, Hárbarðr's challenge to Þórr that opens the four-part sequence-organization of the following dialogue may be viewed as appended to a passage that participates in a different structural sequence.

Table 2. Bax and Padmos's model of the *mannjafnaðr* (1983, 164)

Turn	**Move**	**Stanzas**					
1	Theme 1 + Formula	15	19	23	29	—	—
2	Rejection + Theme 2	16	20	24	30	37	40
3	Rejection	17	21	25	31	38	41
4	Defence (+ Formula)	18	22	26	32	39	42
(5)	Recursive (+ Formula)			27	33		43
(6)				28	34		44
(7)					35		45
(8)					36		46

Marcel Bax and Tineke Padmos end up with a slightly different model from the perspective of pragmatics and conversation analysis. They see *Hrbl* 13–4 as transitional (1983, 157). They follow Clover's observation of a four-part sequence but consider it to begin one turn later. They view the fourth part of the sequence as Hárbarðr's response to Þórr's short statement, and everything that follows before the next cycle is treated as an extension, as shown in Table 2. Because they do not interpret *Hrbl* 38 as an interruption, *Hrbl* 37–39 is read as its own cycle alongside *Hrbl* 40–42, for which Clover's

[10] Clover adds to these the observation of "partial or protosequences" in *Hrbl* 3–5, 9–11, 47–49, and 56–57, in "what appears to be an underlying habit of mind" (1979, 134).

interpretation seems superior. They consider *Hrbl* 43–46 as an extension of *Hrbl* 37–39, although *Hrbl* 43 does not seem to connect with the preceding dialog comparably to *Hrbl* 27 or 33, but rather to anticipate subsequent claims to knowledge that Þórr lacks.

I offer yet another alternative overview of the organization of the dialogue in Table 3.

Table 3. Overview of the contents of *Hárbarðsljóð*. '*' indicates that the last passage is or includes a prompt for the first turn that begins the next sequence.

	Hrbl	**Turns**	**Description**
i	1–10	10	Establishment of the situation and interlocutor identification.
ii	11–14*	4	Þórr raises the question of a quarrel, threatens what would happen if he waded the sound, and Hárbarðr challenges him to do so, comparing himself to the mighty giant Hrungnir.
iii	15–25*	11	Boasts; Þórr responds only with short prompts or evaluations in 17, 21, and 25.
iv	26–28*	3	Hárbarðr responds to Þórr's short criticism with an insult, prompting a threat, which Hárbarðr mocks.
v	29–42	14	Two pairs of boasts each with digressions/interruptions.
vi	43–46	4	Þórr asks where Hárbarðr got his 'words', identified with the dead in mounds.
vii	47–50	4	Þórr threatens Hárbarðr, who responds by asserting that Þórr is being cuckolded.
viii	51–60	10	Þórr complains about the delay, opening a final series in which Þórr is told to travel on foot, concluding with a threat by Þórr and a curse by Hárbarðr.

I distinguish eight parts. Parts (i) and (ii) form an introduction of 14 turns. Part (iii) is the consecutive series of three cycles of the four-part sequence organization. Whether *Hrbl* 25 is viewed as belonging to Part (iii) or Part (iv), I consider *Hrbl* 26 a break as an insult referencing a mythological event that may have connotations of *ergi*.[11] Parts (iii–iv) are another 14-turn group. Part (v) is the following two cycles with digressions and interruptions, also 14 turns. Part (vi) is a four-turn digression about knowledge. Part (vii) is a four-turn exchange of a threat and knowledge, which, with Part (viii) as a concluding sequence, forms another 14-turn group.

Although Part (v) might be an accidental jump to another dialogue through an associative link, it may also be paired with Part (vi) as a structural parallel to the relation of the third sequence of Part (iii) to Part (iv). Parts (iii–iv) present three cycles of the four-part sequence, varying the conclusion of the third. Part (v) presents two additional cycles followed by Part (vii) as a variation on the third. Both Parts (iv) and (vii) are characterized by Hárbarðr's introduction of a mythological event for the humiliation of

[11] In embodied performance, *þér var í hanzka troðit* ('you were stuffed into a mitten') may be accompanied by a fisting gesture, whereby *þér* becomes interpretable as a dative of body parts and *hanzki* a metaphor for part of Þórr getting stuffed (*ljóðaháttr*'s syntax would allow the separation of the pronoun and noun), making Þórr's blaze of fury more understandable.

Þórr. Even if the recurrence of groups of 14 (and 4+10) turns is accidental,[12] *Hárbarðsljóð* exhibits a balanced structure of parallel three-part structures framed by an opening and conclusion.

Structure and Variation

Accepting that the text represents an oral tradition, a comparative perspective allows a number of inferences about variation in that tradition. The genre indicates that the text would always be constituted as a dialogue rather than third-person narration, which would presumably constitute translation into another genre. The narrative framing situation and event sequence can also be considered stable: Þórr arrives at a water boundary, asks for a ferry, a dialogue ensues, and he leaves frustrated. This sequence might be preceded or followed by additional narration or integrated into a chain of events and encounters, but its basic structure is a very simple chain bound by causal relations that cannot be altered without causing additional changes that would most likely make it seen as a different dialogue or story – e.g. if Þórr were presumed not to need a ferry, the ferryman were to comply with the request, or Þórr were to wade the sound and slay the ferryman. The opening and conclusion of the dialogue might vary textually, but the narrative structure and genre would limit such variations to functional equivalents, maintaining the following basic sequence:

REQUEST→NON-COMPLIANCE(→…)→RESIGNATION

Within the preserved text, the initial REQUEST→NON-COMPLIANCE sequence is spread across ten turns of dialogue as Part (i), although it could equally be accomplished in two. The concluding RESIGNATION sequence is also here considered spread across ten turns of dialogue as Part (viii). From a purely structural perspective, these complete the over-arching narrative and the two of them could form a complete performance. Although links are formed between some individual exchanges and exchange sequences, the overall organization of *Hrbl* 11–50 is not built on causal relations or a transparent semantic progression (e.g. small, bigger, biggest). Part (ii) opens the *mannjafnaðr* contest, after which Part (viii) could follow almost any turn of Hárbarðr's speech. The boasts of Part (iii) are linked semantically to Hárbarðr's mention of Hrungnir concluding Part (ii). However, Parts (iv) and (v) lack such transparent links, the relevance of Part (vi) within the sequence is obscure, and Part (vii) could also be moved earlier, although it is effective as a concluding exchange that appears to motivate Þórr to give up on the ferry and continue his journey. Among the different parts of the narrative, what was of central significance may have varied both locally or regionally

[12] The numerical arrangement of turns are unaffected if GKS 2365 4to's lack of breaks after *Hrbl* 35 and 59 reflect the loss of a preceding turn in dictation or manuscript transmission, or Þórr's response to *Hrbl* 34 lacked lexical material that could be transcribed, noting that non-lexical expletives (cf. English *oh*, *oi*, *oof*, *ow*, *ugh*, etc.) and vocables are never transcribed (distinct from the lexical expletive particles *of* and *um*).

and over time. When compared with variation in Finno-Karelian epics, preserved in sometimes hundreds of examples collected across many different regions, it would be unsurprising if *Hárbarðsljóð* had local forms with only three exchanges of boasts and insults. If its central significance was that Óðinn was steering Þórr's journey to an encounter that would follow in another performance, *Hárbarðsljóð* may have been performed as only Parts (i) and (viii).

Although each sequence has a complex internal structure, often with the same basic schema, the principle of linking units of knowledge as boasts and insults is often unclear or perhaps absent. Some links are visible, such as the reference to Hrungnir in *Hrbl* 14 or parallelism in the openings of *Hrbl* 23 and 24, but these are few and often weak or superficial. The sequence organization predicts responses of a question, evaluation, or criticism, but the category of response is not governed by a regular relation to the preceding utterance. The absence of strong causal or semantic connections and the irregularity of responses make them vulnerable to social variation through renewal and transposition, although the structural hierarchy of parts and their constituents may have limited what variations were common (Frog 2013, 107–9). Some variation might be thematically conditioned by being a feat of the respective god in the local tradition, and sexual adventures might be considered more appropriate to Óðinn than to Þórr. Nevertheless, variation between *Hárbarðsljóð* and Snorri's *Edda* concerning which god made stars from the *jǫtunn* Þjazi's eyes (*Hrbl* 19; *Skáldskaparmál* G56) illustrates that feats could be transposed. Thus, boasts and insults may not only have varied within *Hárbarðsljóð* but also been transposed across speakers.

If *Hárbarðsljóð* was conventionally performed by two people, their interdependence would constrain variation. The sort of variation observed in manuscripts of simply moving the change in speaker up or down in a series of lines of a 'poem' only works for a written text or an oral text performed continuously by a single performer. A single performer can take many liberties and maintain fluid and unbroken delivery amid accidental jumps and transpositions. In contrast, dialogic performance requires predictability to avoid lags and accidental interruptions, and significant deviation from the script may create confusion and disruption. Whereas turns in *ljóðaháttr* dialogues normally have a predictable duration, *Hárbarðsljóð* would simply have to be remembered. From a performance perspective, its formal irregularity would most likely constrain rather than open variation, especially in the rapid exchange of *Hrbl* 32–6, where an extra line might disrupt timing and produce interruptions or an exchange of phrasing might accidentally signal the wrong response. On the other hand, the interruption of *Hrbl* 38 seems more likely to be an exception within the broader tradition rather than something with long-term social durability. As a rule of thumb, simple forms are more historically stable, while complex forms are more likely to get streamlined. It is possible that the preserved form of *Hárbarðsljóð* was documented precisely because of its virtuosity – its short, rapid turns and even interruptions that seem to contrast with the *ljóðaháttr* dialogues – i.e. its exceptionality in the corpus might have been a factor behind why it was written down.

Summation

Hárbarðsljóð is the most compelling example of an eddic text that was not a 'poem' but a script of a performance. Structurally, it stands out in a way that suggests it represents a very different tradition from other eddic poetry, whether in terms of genre or of local tradition. The preserved text looks almost chaotic as a 'poem'. This might be in part because the person who dictated it was centrally concerned with the content of utterances and parallelisms between them rather than their metrical form. However, the pace of stretches of the dialogue suggests that this may simply represent a practice organized around formal and aesthetic principles that are not directly commensurate with anything else in the eddic corpus. As a whole, and despite my reservations about the belongingness of Part (vi), *Hárbarðsljóð* appears complexly structured in ways that predict a lot of variation in its social transmission. Nevertheless, the irregularities that characterize its turns and their organization seem to demand minimizing variation in performance, especially in those stretches where turns are shorter and the pace appears more rapid. The type of trading of lines between speakers observed in manuscripts would not have occurred in performance.

Bibliography

Manuscripts

Den Arnamagnæanske Samling, Copenhagen
AM 748 I a 4to
Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Reykjavík
Lbs 636 4to
Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík
AM 748 II 4to
AM 738 4to
GKS 2365 4to

Secondary Sources

Bampi, Massimiliano, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Rikhardsdottir, eds. 2020. *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*. Studies in Old Norse Literature. Boydell & Brewer.

Bauman, Richard 1975 [1984]. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Waveland Press.

Ben-Amos, Dan, and Kenneth Goldstein, eds. *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. Approaches to Semiotics 40. Mouton.

Bax, Marcel, and Tineke Padmos. 1983. "Two Types of Verbal Dueling in Old Icelandic: The Interactional Structure of the *senna* and the *mannjafnaðr* in *Hárbarðsljóð.*" *Scandinavian Studies* 55, no. 2: 149–74.

Clover, Carol J. 1979. "*Hárbarðsljóð* as Generic Farce." *Scandinavian Studies* 51, no. 2: 124–45.

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson. 1962. *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld* I. Almenna bókafélagið.

Foley, John Miles. 1995. *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. Indiana University Press.

Frog. 2013. "The Parallax Approach: Situating Traditions in Long-Term Perspective." In *Approaching Methodology*, 2nd rev. edn. by Frog and Pauliina Latvala with Helen F. Leslie, 101–31. Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae Humaniora 368. Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

———. 2016. "'Genres, Genres Everywhere, but Who Knows What to Think?:' Toward a Semiotic Model." In *Genre – Text – Interpretation: Perspectives from Folklore and Beyond*, edited by Kaarina Koski and Frog with Ulla Savolainen, 47–88. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 22. Finnish Literature Society.

———. 2021. "Preserving Blunders in Eddic Poems: Formula Variation in Numbered Inventories of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*." *Scripta Islandica* 72: 43–91. DOI: 10.33063/diva-43940.

———. 2022. "Rituelle Autoritäten und narrativer Diskurs: Vormoderne finno-karelische Sagenüberlieferungen als analoges Modell für die Annäherung an mittelalterliche Quellen." In *Magie und Literatur: Erzählkulturelle Funktionalisierung magischer Praktiken in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, edited by Andreas Hammer, Wilhelm Heizmann and Norbert Kössinger, 153–207. Philologische Studien und Quellen 280. Erich Schmidt Verlag.

———. 2024a (forthcoming). "Rhyme in *dróttkvætt*, from Old Germanic Inheritance to Contemporary Poetic Ecology III: The Old Norse Poetic Ecology." *Studia Metrica et Poetica* 11, no. 1.

———. 2024b (forthcoming). "Zombies of Oral Poetry? – On the Reanimation of Extinct Oral Poems in Seventeenth-Century Scandinavia." In *Song Genres in Social and Cultural Contexts*, edited by Kati Kallio and Venla Sykäri. Studia Fennica Folkloristica. Finnish Literature Society.

Frog and Eila Stepanova. 2025 (forthcoming). "Lamenters, Mythic Knowledge and Ritual Practice: The Question of Traditions in Late Iron Age and Medieval Scandinavia." In *Women and Goddesses in Old Norse Religion*, edited by Tommy Kuusela and Ingunn Ásdísardóttir. Brepols.

Gísli Sigurðsson. 1998. "Inngangur" [Introduction]. In *Eddukvæði*, edited by Gísli Sigurðsson, ix–li. Mál og menning.

Gunnell, Terry. 1995. *The Origins of Scandinavian Drama*. D. S. Brewer.

———. 2001. "*Hof*, Halls, *goðar* and Dwarves: An Examination of the Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic Hall." *Cosmos* 17: 3–36.

———. 2003. "'Til holts ek gekk…:' The Performance Demands of *Skírnismál*, *Fáfnismál* and *Sigrdrífumál* in Liminal Time and Sacred Space." In *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions: An International Conference in Lund, Sweden, June 3–7, 2004*, edited by Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, and Catharina Raudvere, 238–42. Vägar till Midgård 8. Nordic Academic Press.

———. 2013. "*Vǫluspá* in Performance." In *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to* Vǫluspá *and Nordic Days of Judgement*, edited by Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen, 63–77. Brepols.

Haukur Þorgeirsson and Teresa Dröfn Njarðvík. 2017. "The Last Eddas on Vellum." *Scripta Islandica* 68: 153–88.

Heusler, Andreas. 1923 [1941]. *Die altgermanische Dichtung*. 2nd edn. Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion.

Honko, Lauri. 2000. "Thick Corpus and Organic Variation: An Introduction." In *Thick Corpus, Organic Variation and Textuality in Oral Tradition*, edited by Lauri Honko, 3–28. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 7. Finnish Literature Society.

Leslie-Jacobsen, Helen F. 2017. "The Ecology of 'Eddic' and 'Skaldic' Poetry." *RMN Newsletter* 12–13: 123–38.

Neckel, Gustav, ed. 1914. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung.

Noreen, Erik. 1926. *Den norsk-isländska Poesien* [The Old Norse-Icelandic poetry]. Norstedt & Söners Förlag.

Phillpotts, Bertha S. 1920. *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*. Cambridge University Press.

Quinn, Judy. 1992. "Verseform and Voice in Eddic Poems: The Discourses of *Fáfnismál*." *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 107: 100–30.

Ready, Jonathan L. 2019. *Orality, Textuality, and the Homeric Epics: An Interdisciplinary Study of Oral Texts, Dictated Texts, and Wild Texts*. Oxford University Press.

Russom, Geoffrey 2009. "Why There are Three Eddic Meters." In *Anglo-Saxons and the North: Essays Reflecting the Theme of the 10th Meeting of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists in Helsinki, August 2001*, edited by Matti Kilpiö, Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, Jane Roberts, and Olga Timofeeva, 69–88. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 364. Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.

de Saussure, Ferdinand. 1916 [1967]. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Éditions Payot & Rivages.

Stepanova, Eila, and Frog. 2019. "On the Analogical Comparison of Performance Environments: Lament Poetry's Soundscape as a Case Study." *RMN Newsletter* 14: 91–111.

Tarkka, Lotte. 2013. *Songs of the Border People: Genre, Intertextuality and Tradition in Kalevala-Meter Poetry*. FF Communications 305. Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Todorov, Tzvetan. 1977. *The Poetics of Prose.* Transl. Richard Howard. Cornell University Press.

FORGING OCCASIONS: EXPLORING THE PERFORMATIVE FRAMEWORK IN *SKÁLDASÖGUR*

Inés García López*

The Concept of Occasion in *skáldasögur*

The main objective of this chapter is to examine Gregory Nagy's concept of 'occasion'[1] and consider its potential relevance in the corpus of *skáldasögur*. In this type of saga, I have identified two distinct types of occasions. My primary focus will be on what I have called 'occasions of performance,' in which composition and performance are depicted concurrently, contrasting with 'occasions of composition,' which entail either a temporal gap between the creation of the poem and its recitation, or the complete absence of performance.

To explore the applicability of the term 'occasion,' I will draw attention to the so-called situational verses, which are those skaldic stanzas that are linked to a particular occasion depicted in a saga narrative. The concept of 'situational verses' has been defined by Margaret Clunies Ross as one of the two types of verses found in Old Norse prose literature. According to Clunies Ross, situational verses are "non-substantiating verses," "part of the story" or "speech acts" considered to be seamlessly integrated within the surrounding prose narrative, representing the utterance of a saga character or poet (Clunies Ross 2005, 71). Diana Whaley adds that situational verses are written "in response to an event, a situation or a verbal cue, and they may themselves affect the course of events or the ensuing conversation" (Whaley 1993, 251). Frog, in his article

* Associate Professor at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain.

[1] Gregory Nagy worked as professor of Classics at Harvard University and is a specialist in archaic Greek poetry. Notable among his publications is the book *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (1996), alongside his article "Genre and Occasion" published in *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* (1994). Mitchell highlights the relevance of Nagy's work as one of the scholars who has followed in Lord's and Parry's ground-breaking footsteps, and promotes the potential for his research to contribute to the study of medieval Northern Europe (Mitchell 2022, 23).

titled "Speech-Acts in Skaldic Verse" (2009), underscores improvisation as a fundamental characteristic of such verses, an issue which should spark debate over the presumed compositional strategies of skaldic poets and their capacity for rapid composition under specific circumstances. Regardless of whether skaldic poems could have been improvised, it is common for saga authors to represent situations where poets are improvising. My goal, therefore, is to elucidate the fictional dimension of these situational verses and their ramifications within the field of pragmatics.

Considering the communicative situation of skaldic verses has several implications. In this respect, we will also analyse the importance of distinguishing the communicative situation represented within the saga fiction from that of the saga itself. This differentiation enables us to consider both the audiences within the narrative (intradiegetic), but also those external to it (extradiegetic).

To achieve this goal, our focus will be on the corpus of *skáldasögur*, where poetry appears as both the vocation of the protagonist and a theme within the narration. This is particularly evident in *Kormáks saga*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, *Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* and *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*.[2]

Types of Occasions Represented in *skáldasögur*

In relation to the communicative setting represented in the saga, we can identify situations where the occasion of composition and performance occur simultaneously. I refer to this type of communicative situation as 'occasions of performance.' Here, the term 'performance' denotes the execution of the poem through a fictionalised dramatisation, involving the performer's body and voice, intonation and gestures that the audience would expect in such a context. Examples of this type of occasion will be discussed later. In the world represented in the sagas, we can also encounter communicative situations where composition and performance do not occur simultaneously: the act of composition is described but the poem's actual text is absent during the narration of its creation. For instance, in Chapter 59 of *Egils saga*, the narrator recounts how Egill remains awake throughout the night to compose the head-ransom poem in praise of King Eiríkr. This chapter provides a detailed description of the composition process, stating: "þá orti Egill alla drápuna ok hafði fest svá, at hann mátti kveða um morgininn" (Sigurður Nordal 1955, 183) ("Egil composed the whole poem and memorized it, so that he could recite it to him when he met him the next morning;" Scudder 2005, 126). The act of poetical composition and its performance are narrated as separate events. This is why the head-ransom poem does not appear in chapter 59; instead, it is included during its performance in the subsequent chapter.

[2] The classification of these sagas under the name *skáldasögur* has been supported by Andersson 1969, Poole 2001 and Clunies Ross 2001. According to them, *Fóstbræðra saga* also belongs to this group. Whaley also includes *Víglundar saga* as a *skáldasaga* (Whaley 2002, xxix–xxxi. "The main characters in theses sagas, all poets, are dark in colouring (red hair is also possible, though less common) and ugly, with prominent features. In temperament, they are quarrelsome and aggressive, but gifted with the ability to compose poetry" (Clunies Ross 2005, 90).

On this type of occasion, focused on describing the moment when the text is composed or written down, we consistently find the verb *yrkja* ('make verses') to denote poetic composition and *kveða* ('say aloud, recite') to signify its performance. Similar instances are found throughout the *skáldasögur*, such as in *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, where in the eleventh chapter, Earl Eiríkr instructs Hallfreðr to compose a poem about him within three nights. Following the allotted time, Hallfreðr recites the poem, for which the earl rewards him generously: "Ok er þjrár nætr váru liðnar, þá fœrði Hallfreðr kvaðit, ok er þetta upphaf á: Bærr est hróðr at heyra, / hjaldrǫrr, umb þik gǫrvan." (*Hallfreðar saga*, 195) ("And when the three nights had passed Hallfred declaimed the poem, and this is the opening of it: You are worthy to hear an ode, / war-valiant, wrought for you;" Örnólfur Thorsson 2002, 106).[3] Hallfreðr's performance is referred to in the text as a past event, not simultaneous with its composition, and the saga only quotes the first two lines. The temporal gap between composition and performance is further problematised in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*. In the seventh chapter, upon Gunnlaugr's arrival in London, King Aðalráðr grants him an audience. The poet announces that he has composed a poem dedicated to the king, and expresses his desire for the monarch to hear it: "En því hefi ek sótt á yðvarn fund, herra, at ek hefi kvæði ort um yðr ok vilda ek at þér hlýddið kvæðinu" (*Gunnlaugs saga*, 15) ("And I have sought this meeting with you, my lord, because I have made a poem about you, and I should like you to listen to it;" *Gunnlaugs saga*, 15). The king agrees and Gunnlaugr proceeds to recite the poem, which is again only partially included in the saga, as only the refrain is provided:

> Herr sésk allr inn ǫrva
> Englands sem guð þengil;
> ætt lýtr grams ok gumna
> gunnbráðs Aðalráði.
>
> All the host stands in awe of the generous prince of England as of God; the race of the war-swift king and all the race of men bow to Ethelred.
> (*Gunnlaugs saga*, 15)

Comparable scenes unfold in the subsequent chapter with the king of Ireland and during Gunnlaugr's visit to the Orkney Islands. However, upon his arrival in Uppsala, Gunnlaugr presents a poem to King Olaf the Swede, who declines to hear it, citing time constraints: "ekki er nú tóm til fire kvæðum at sitja" (*Gunnlaugs saga*, 21) ("there is no time now to attend to poems;" *Gunnlaugs saga* 1957, 21). In this instance, the recitation of the poem is postponed, illustrating a deliberate manipulation of the temporal separation between composition and performance. In this case, the saga does not include any verses of this laudatory poem, only the following reference: "Þá kvað Gunnlaugr drápuna er hann hafði orta um Óláf konung. Ok er lokit var drápunni, þá mælti konungr, 'Hrafn,' segir hann, 'hversu er kvaðit ort?'" (*Gunnlaugs saga*, 22) ("Then Gunnlaug recited the *drápa* which he had composed about King Óláfr, and when it was

[3] Translated by Diana Whaley.

finished the king said, "Hrafn,[4] how is that poem for workmanship?;"' *Gunnlaugs saga*, 22). In *Bjarnar saga Hítdælakappa*, a similar pattern emerges wherein the poet crafts a poem, seeks authorisation for its performance, and is subsequently rewarded with gold or weapons, as illustrated when Bjǫrn presents a poem to Earl Eiríkr in the fifth chapter. Across these episodes, the acts of composition and performance are consistently depicted as non-simultaneous endeavours, thus making them pertinent examples of 'occasions of composition.'

Reconstructing the performance of Old Norse poetry presents considerable challenges. It is imperative to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Terry Gunnell in this regard (1995; 2001; 2016). The "Old Norse Poetry in Performance" conference, which has been held since 2016 in Oxford, has also served as a forum for debate over Nordic poetry's performance. Many of its reflections have been compiled in the volume *Old Norse Poetry in Performance* (McMahon and Ferreira 2022). As this body of research suggests, insights can be gleaned into the role of poetry's performance within saga fiction and its connection to composition. In this regard, the concept of 'occasion,' employed in this paper and borrowed from Gregory Nagy's study of archaic Greek poetry, provides a framework for contemplating the implications of communicative situations – a fundamental aspect of a pragmatic approach.

Forging Occasions in Skaldic Poetry

In his article "Genre and Occasion," Nagy discusses the challenges of considering poetry in an archaic social context as a genre, noting that "the technology of writing was involved in neither the composition nor the performance" (Nagy 1994, 11). In oral societies, or in societies where writing technologies are not very developed, definitions of 'genre' must be correlated with questions of 'occasion.' Nagy regards composition and performance as two fundamental factors in oral poetry, following the criteria developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord where composition and performance coexist as a continuum. In oral poetry, they are both aspects of the same process, unlike in written traditions. This distinction is also evident in the sagas where both activities can be represented separately. Nagy also follows Richard Martin's 1989 work *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Illiad,* where the author connects Lord's observations about performance to John L. Austin's theories about the performative uses of language. Lord's concept of performance as "bringing the words of a song to life" and Austin's definition of the performative as the act of doing something when you say something can be easily applied to a song, understanding it as a speech act. However, Austin resisted the idea that poetry could be considered as a speech act as well, because for him poetry is a matter of writing, not speaking (Nagy 1994, 12). Martin, in *The Language of Heroes,* details the performative aspects of Homeric song. He specifies the occasion that each song represents (a praise song, a lament, and so on), but also notes how the occasion for the whole performance of the Homeric song remains unexplained (Martin 1989, 1–43). We can draw a parallel here with saga narrations: for instance, in

[4] Hrafn Ǫnundarson was another poet that was with King Óláfr at the time.

Egils saga there are numerous occasions where the circumstances of a poem's performance or composition are described, regardless of whether they occur simultaneously. Thus, we can easily identify within the text the various occasions of *lausavísur* in the fictional narrative, interpreting 'occasion' as the contextual backdrop of a speech act, as proposed by Nagy. However, we lack any markers indicating the occasion for the performance of the saga itself.[5]

This perspective on the term 'occasion' already has consequences for how we should define 'genre.' Nagy establishes another interesting connection between these two concepts. There are instances where occasion *is* genre, essentially replacing it. But, as Nagy suggests, "if the occasion is destabilized or lost, the genre can compensate for it, even re-create it." Nagy further posits that "if ritual frames myth in traditional societies: myth is performed, and the performance is ritual" (Nagy 1994, 13–14).

But once ritual or the framework of performance is lost, what remains? In such cases, genre must step in to recreate the occasion. Genre can therefore compensate for the lost occasion. Here, 'lost' should be understood as unknown or inaccessible. I will revisit this point at the end of my chapter.

To illustrate the application of the term 'occasion' in situational skaldic verses, consider the third poem in *Egils saga*, found in Chapter 30. This poem is a *lausavísa* that Skalla-Grímr composes for his servants. The servants complain about having to get up too early to work at the forge. Skalla-Grímr responds with a beautiful stanza praising blacksmithing:

> Mjǫk tekr ár, sás aura,
> ísarns meiðr at rísa,
> váðir vidda bróður
> veðrseygjar skal kveðja;
> gjalla lætk á golli
> geisla njóts, meðan þjóta,
> heitu, hrœrikytjur
> hreggs vindfrekar, sleggjur.
> (Sigurður Nordal 1955, 79)

> The tree of iron [BLACKSMITH] is obliged to rise very early, who wants to gain silver from the wind-sucking clothing of the brother of Viddi [WIND > BELLOWS]. I let sledge-hammers ring on the hot gold of the owner of lightbeams [FIRE > IRON], while the wind-greedy stirring-huts of the blast [BELLOWS] roar.
> (Clunies Ross 2005, 89)

With an excess of imagination – a quality undoubtedly essential for understanding skaldic poetry – some of the metaphors in this stanza could also be interpreted as a vindication of the poet's craft and the act of poetic performance. For example, the

[5] *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* is famous for its depiction of a wedding in Reykjahólar in 1119, where a saga is orally presented. However, this 'occasion' is also fictionalised in the narration (*Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, Chapter 10).

kenningar for bellows could be seen as a metaphor for the lungs of the poet, illustrating how he has to control the air during recitation. The expression 'to gain silver from the bellows' reflects how the poet makes money and gains silver through his performances, a recurrent theme in *skáldasögur*.

In Skalla-Grímr's poem, we can liken the sound of the hammer in the forge to the metrical rhythm of the verses, echoing the banging sound of the alliterating staves. This comparison serves as an allegory for the poet's act of performance, evoking the rhythmical body of the poem emphasised during the recitation.

Given this interpretation, the intended audience for this stanza is not solely Skalla-Grímr's servants, that is to say, it goes beyond the intradiegetic audience. The vindication of the poet's craft is addressed to a second audience that is obviously not present during the performance of the poem represented within the saga's fiction. Skalla-Grímr's stanza is therefore directed at a dual audience: an intradiegetic audience represented by the servants and an extradiegetic, which encompasses a potential audience outside the fictional frame of the narration. This second audience is invoked through allegorical interpretation and refers to the communicative situation of the saga itself, addressing a historical audience rather than a fictional one. The actual medieval poet composed a stanza attributed to Skalla-Grímr as an allegory about the art of poetic creation for the saga's historical thirteenth-century audience, which would not be assembled until many centuries after the supposed date of the stanza's performance.

In *Kormáks saga*, we encounter another example of such allegory, although in this case the poet's act of performance is depicted not in relation to a forge but to a laundry-beater.

In the chapter featuring this poem, Bersi has married Steingerðr, prompting Kormákr to urge his horse to pursue Bersi. Upon reaching Hrútafjörður, the horse succumbs to exhaustion, halting their journey. Subsequently, Kormákr's companions arrive and they seek assistance from Þórveig who offers boats for rent. Although they secure one, it is found to be damaged and they have to return it. Despite being deceived by Þórveig, Kormákr is compelled to pay with silver coins for the rented boat (*Kormáks saga* 1939, 228–30). It is within this context that he delivers the following poem:

At emk, Yggjar gǫtva	I am busy, god of Odin's
Ullr, at Svǫlnis fulli	garments, with Odin's drink
of reiði-Sif rjóða	for the rosy goddess of the laundry-
runns sem vífl at brunni.	beater – busy as the beater at the spring.
Dýrt verðr dǫggvar kerti	Many candles of Draupnir's dew
Draupnis margt at kaupa:	will cost a pretty price;
þrimr aurum skal þetta	for three ounces that ship
Þórveigar skip leiga.	from Thorveig shall be hired.
(*Kormáks saga* 1939, 230)	(Thorsson 2002, 22; transl. Rory McTurk)

Odin's (Ygg's) *garments*: armour;
their *god* (Ull): warrior;
Odin's (Svolnir's) *drink*: poetry
goddess (Sif) *of the laundry-beater*: woman
Draupnir's (a magic ring's) *dew*: gold; its *candles*: precious articles

In this case, as in Skalla-Grímr's poem, composition and performance are given simultaneously. The audience within the saga's fiction comprises Þórveig and Kormákr's men, though he also addresses the poem to his beloved Steingerðr who is absent at that moment. Kormákr describes himself composing the poem, highlighting the act of composition in the first *helmingr*. The parallelism established between poetry's creation and some kind of manual labour, which in the previous example was the forge and is now represented by a clothes beater,[6] based on the inherent rhythm and repetitive sound in both activities. Kormákr is as busy composing poetry as the clothes beater is at the spring. This parallel underscores again the importance of the rhythmic body of the poems and the repetitive sound of alliterations. As previously stated, the allegories for poetic composition woven through these verses may allude to the communicative contexts of their sagas, demonstrating that they were targeted at historical audiences.

Historical and Fictional Audiences

Regarding the two types of audiences, what levels of comprehension were fictional audiences represented as having and did historical audiences actually have of these verses and allegories, spanning from the thirteenth century to future readers? I am particularly interested in exploring the oral performance experience of these verses because it is uncertain whether the rhythmic dimension of these poems is fully conveyed through silent reading. Additionally, what were the expectations of composers and performers regarding the comprehension of *kenningar*? A poem's meaning and its poet's intention were not always depicted as immediately apparent to intradiegetic audiences. Chapter 18 of *Gísla saga* presents a good example of these difficulties: a great crowd of people were gathered to see the winter games, with several women sitting up on a slope. Among them, there was Þórdís, who comes to see Gísli, her brother, participating in the games. During a break, as Gísli was gazing at Þorgrímr's burial mound, he spoke a verse, which the narrator of the saga suggests he should have kept to himself. Þórdís memorised the stanza after hearing it just once and, on her way home, gradually worked out its meaning. By the time she had reached home, Þórdís had deduced that Gísli's verse was a confession to the murder of her husband, Þorgrímr. This episode shows that there could be a temporal gap between a poem's performance and the audience's comprehension of it, illustrating that understanding the high figurative level of skaldic poetry demanded the active engagement of the audience.

But, what about the audience's experience of the sound and rhythm? It's important to note that the skaldic metrical form contrasts significantly with prose. Skaldic poetry is characterised by its emphasis on linguistic craftsmanship and by the use of artifice that poses a challenge for both the audience and the performer, thereby engaging listeners or readers in the process of constructing meaning and possible interpretations.

[6] In this sense, Clunies Ross states that "several technical terms for some of the formal characteristics of skaldic poetry were clearly derived from the vocabulary of metal and wood-working (from analogies), suggesting that the poet's art was considered comparable, in the intellectual sphere, to the skilled craftman's in the material" (Clunies Ross 2005, 84).

Despite the possibility of incomplete understanding, the rhythmic structure of the poem constitutes a constellation of sounds that resonate within the bodies of the audience. Annemari Ferreira, in her article "*Tíð*, *Tíðindi*: Skaldic Verse as Performance Event," discusses the significance of rhythm in skaldic poetry and asserts: "Rhythm cannot be experienced statically. […] To feel the rhythm is to be within the body which makes us aware of time" (Ferreira 2017, 49). The meaning of situational verses is linked to the occasion depicted in their narration, while the performance of rhythm can be replicated on future occasions.

Although, in the terms outlined here, the occasion of the saga itself is lost, we can still employ the notion of genre to categorise the saga as a unique textual form among others. Moreover, while the fictional occasions for the skaldic verses found within prose are preserved, their true historical contexts remain elusive. In fact, it is thanks to sagas that most of the extant skaldic material has been preserved.[7] *Lausavísur* may have either been part of longer poems that were subsequently scattered throughout the prose, or they may have been composed by saga creators as occasional verses. Reconstructing these hypothetical longer poems from earlier times is an exceedingly daunting task, as we are uncertain to what extent the saga editors intervened in the poems during transcription or if they added new material (Ferreira 2017, 53–54). An instance of this is found in *Hallfreðar saga*: a series of *lausavísur* likely comprising part of a mocking poem (*níð*) called *Gríssvísur* (Poole 2001, 144–49). In terms of performance, it could be argued that the prose compensates for the loss of the presumed recitation context once shared between the poet and their audience. This is an example of how the transition to the written form meant texts engaging with a process of reconstruction. Despite observed inconsistencies between the content of the poetry and the prose around it, saga editors often employ prose to contextualise poems due to the loss of the original occasion, which is typically fictionalised in the narration. Many sagas, or more precisely, their prose, can be characterised as both acts and the art of fictionalising occasions, encompassing both performance and composition. In the prosimetrical form of the sagas, we can observe an alternation of prose and verse due to genre conventions. Rhythm, for example, is a genre marker. In skaldic poetry, we witness how rhythm becomes intensified in the absence of a specific occasion. In the examples provided earlier, the poet emerges as an architect of rhythm, allowing the poem to speak about itself, about its own form, thereby emphasising its distinctive genre. The poem contemplates its own construction through allegorically thematised rhythm, a self-reflexive artifice based on genre conventions.

As a final conclusion, the lost or unknown occasion is doubly inscribed or marked by genre convention, both through allegories about rhythm and through the fictionalisation of the performances in which poems are framed.

[7] Skaldic poems are also preserved in grammatical treatises and *Snorra Edda*. Verses in vernacular language were used to teach grammar in the same way that classical verses were used to teach Latin (Whaley 2012, xci; García López 2015, 40). The use of skaldic poetry as a pedagogical tool in this way resulted in an increase in the number of poets during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in both religious circles and powerful families in Iceland (Nordal 2001, 142–43).

Bibliography

Primary sources

Bjarnar saga hítdœlakappa = Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, ed. 1938. In *Borgfirðinga sögur*, edited by Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit 3. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Egils saga = Sigurður Nordal, ed. 1955. *Egils saga*. Íslenzk fornrit 2. *Hið íslenzka* fornritafélag.

Gísla saga Súrssonar = Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, ed. 1943. In *Vestfirðinga sögur*, edited by Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson. Íslenzk fornrit 6. Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Gunnlaugs saga = P. G. Foote, ed. 1957. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* / *The Story of Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue*. Translated by R. Quirk. Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.

Hallfreðar saga = Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed. 1939. *Hallfreðar saga*. In *Vatnsdæla saga*, edited by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 133–200. Íslenzk fornrit 8. *Hið íslenzka* fornritafélag.

Kormáks saga = Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed. 1939. *Kormáks saga*. In *Vatnsdæla Saga*, edited by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 201–302. Íslenzk fornrit 8. *Hið íslenzka* fornritafélag.

Þorgils saga ok Hafliða = Brown [afterwards Dronke], Ursula. ed. 1952. *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*. Oxford English Monographs. Oxford University Press.

Secondary sources

Andersson, Theodore M. 1969. "Skalds and Troubadours." *Medieval Scandinavia* 2: 7–41.

Bjarni Einarson. 1961. *Skáldasögur: Um uppruna og eðli ástaskáldsagnanna fornu* [Novels: On the origin and nature of the ancient love novels]. Bókaútgafa Menningarsjóðs.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1986 [1952]. "The Problem of the Speech Genres." In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, 60–102. University of Texas Press.

Clunies Ross, Margaret. 2005. *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*. Brewer.

———. 2001. "The Skald Sagas as a Genre: Definitions and Typical Features." In *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, edited by Russell Poole, 25–49. Walter de Gruyter.

Dronke, Ursula. 1978. "The Poet's Persona in the Skalds' Sagas." *Parergon* 22: 23–28.

Ferreira, Annemari. 2017. "*Tíð, tíðindi*: Skaldic Verse as Performance Event." In *Performing Medieval Text*, edited by Ardis Butterfield, Henry Hope, and Pauline Souleau, 53–69. Legenda.

Frog. 2009. "Speech-Acts in Skaldic Verse: Genre, Compositional Strategies and Improvisation." In *Versatility in Versification: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Metrics*, edited by Tonya Kim Dewey, and Frog, 223–46. Peter Lang.

García López, Inés. 2015. "Ars Poetica Borealis." *Quimera: Revista de Literatura*, 380–81: 40–42.

Gísli Sigurðsson. 2004. *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*. Harvard University Press.

Guðrún Nordal. 2001. *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*. University of Toronto Press.

Gunnell, Terry. 2016. "Eddic Performance and Eddic Audiences." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, 92–113. Cambridge University Press.

———. 2001. "*Hof*, Halls, *Goðar*, and Dwarves: An Examination of Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic Hall." *Cosmos* 17: 3–36.

———. 1995. *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*. Boydell & Brewer.

Heslop, Kate. 2022. *Viking Mediologies: A New Story of Skaldic Poetics*. Fordham University Press.

Martin, Richard, P. 1989. *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the* Illiad. Cornell University Press.

McMahon, Brian and Annemari Ferreira, eds. 2022. *Old Norse Poetry in Performance*. Routledge.

Mitchell, Stephen. 2013. "Memory, Mediality and the Performative Turn: Recontextualizing Remembering in Medieval Scandinavia." *Scandinavian Studies* 85, no. 3: 282–305.

———. 2022. "Framing Old Norse Contexts: The Wedding at Reykjahólar (1119) Revisited." In *Old Norse Poetry in Performance*, edited by Brian McMahon and Annemari Ferreira, 19–44. Routledge.

Nagy, Gregory. 1994. "Genre and Occasion." *Mètis: Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* 9–10: 11–25.

———. 1996. *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond*. Cambridge University Press.

O'Donoghue, Heather. 2005. "The Role of Verses in Norse Historical Works." In *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, edited by Heather O'Donoghue, 10–77. Oxford University Press.

Poole, Russell, ed. 1997. "Composition Transmission Performance: The First Ten *lausavísur* in *Kórmaks saga*." *Alvíssmál* 7: 37–60.

———. 2001. "The Relation between Verses and Prose in *Hallfreðar saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga*." In *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, edited by Russell Poole, 125–71. Walter de Gruyter.

Scudder, Bernard, transl. 2005. *Egil's Saga*. Penguin Classics.

Whaley, Diana. 1993. "Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*." In *Snorri Sturluson: Kolloquium anläßlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, edited by Alois Wolf, 245–66. ScriptOralia 51. Narr.

———. 2002. "Introduction." In *Sagas of the Warrior-Poets*, edited by Örnólfur Thorsson, ix–liv. Penguin Books.

———, ed. 2012. *Poetry from the Kings' sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*. *Skaldic Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages, Vol. 1*. Brepols.

Örnólfur Thorsson, ed. 2002. *Sagas of the Warrior-Poets*. Penguin Books.

DANGEROUS WOMEN BY THE SHORE: READING *HJÁLMÞÉS SAGA OK ÖLVIS* THROUGH GRAECO-ROMAN MYTH AND LEGEND

Camilla Asplund Ingemark*

In this contribution, I attempt to combine two of Terry Gunnell's areas of expertise: the study of folk legends – particularly 'dead' ones (Gunnell 2013) – and Old Norse literature (see e.g. Gunnell 2005; 2016). While Terry is equally at home in both fields, and others besides, I would not pretend to be the same; thus, this is a text written by someone who is a folklorist first, a Classicist second, and a budding Old Norse scholar third.

I will proceed from one of Terry Gunnell's (many) memorable formulations on the character of folk legends, in this case, legends set on the shoreline and by the sea, and apply it to a passage in the late legendary saga *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, which is preserved in different versions in twenty-four manuscripts from the seventeenth century onward. The earliest possible date of composition is generally held to be the latter half of the fourteenth century (Harris 2017). The passage in question concerns the first meeting at the shoreline of the saga hero Hjálmþér's widowed father, Ingi, and a mysterious woman calling herself Lúða; she will soon become Hjálmþér's stepmother. Yet things are not quite what they seem.

As Gunnell states, legends of the shoreline are not just any legends, but ones that embody our notions of otherness, danger, and the 'outside:'

> …it is perhaps not surprising that the sea shore with its sands, rocks, pools and shingle should have also resounded with countless memories and folk legends, underlining the general uncertainty and fears that people felt about this particular shifting space on the edge: This was a space where you meet the "other," not only in the form of death, but also in the shape of strange beings that come from the "outside," beings which, like the space itself, were a blend of chaos and cosmos, the wild and the civilised, the human and the animal; beings that questioned the moral lines between good and evil. (Gunnell 2017, 11–12)

* Uppsala University, Campus Gotland.

There could not be a more precise characterisation of Hjálmþér's stepmother Lúða in the saga, and it is on her that this chapter focuses. As we will see, she is a formidable character, as beautiful and enigmatic as she is lustful and voracious. While being identified as a *tröll* in the saga, a native Icelandic supernatural creature, the motif of her attempted seduction of Hjálmþér has invited comparisons with Graeco-Roman myth, especially the legend of Phaedra (O'Connor 2000). I extend this line of inquiry by reading the saga through two distinct plots of Ancient Greek and Roman myths/legends, of which the myth of Phaedra is one and the legend of the man-eating *empousa* of Corinth is the other.

Though I would have liked to frame this as an issue of influence, direct or indirect, the evidence for the impact of literature in Greek before the seventeenth century is rather scarce (see e.g. Glad 2011, 69; Lavender 2018), whereas that for works in Latin is more plentiful, but sometimes inconclusive when it comes to Classical authors (see below). Instead, I will have to content myself with offering these Graeco-Roman legends as an optic through which to read the saga, teasing out latent opposing tendencies in the portrayal of Lúða. This optic also reinforces the otherness of characters of foreign origin, such as Lúða. The depiction of otherness in the saga has indeed been a prominent feature in prior research, for instance in Sandra Ballif Straubhaar's and Henric Bagerius' respective works (Straubhaar 2001; Bagerius 2009, 145–47). This paper extends that tradition, but reconsiders it in terms of the saga's relation to Graeco-Roman myth and legend, a line of inquiry represented in Ralph O'Connor's work.

The figure of the lustful stepmother, Lúða, is doubtless the most colourful and memorable in this saga, as is her ancestry. As Ralph O'Connor (2000) and Henric Bagerius (2009, 147–50) have indicated, she has several counterparts in both Old Icelandic and Old Irish sources, but here I intend to explore her affinities with figures of Graeco-Roman myth. This is partially prompted by the fact that when Lúða introduces herself to Hjálmþér's father in the saga, she insinuates that she is Greek, her late husband Lucrätus having ruled over the city of Bóósia (Boeotia, a district in Ancient Greece). I interpret this as an overt attempt at setting the frame of reference against which we are to read her story, especially since her late husband was actually the king of Arabia.

Summary of the Plot

In order to give the reader a notion of what this entertaining saga contains, I briefly rehearse the main points of its plot. The main character Hjálmþér is a prince, and his foster-brother Ölvir is the son of an earl. Early in the saga, Hjálmþér's mother dies, and his father refuses to remarry until he encounters the beautiful but enigmatic Lúða. The father and Lúða marry in all haste, so quickly, in fact, that Hjálmþér is unable to attend the wedding. When Hjálmþér and Lúða finally meet, she tries to seduce him, and he rebuffs her violently.

Hjálmþér and Ölvir repeatedly depart for hunting forays and raiding trips, and during these, they encounter a giant and a *finngálkn*, a creature resembling a horse, and each of them receives a magic sword. Lúða and Hjálmþér now meet again, and she hurls a curse at him: he will have no peace until he has seen princess Hervör. Hjálmþér utters

a counter-curse, to the effect that Lúða is incapacitated and will not be able to harm him further. The journey to see princess Hervör ensues, and with him are his faithful companion Ölvir and a willful swineherd, a slave called Hörðr. The three of them encounter ugly trolls and giants that they unceremoniously kill, and then they arrive at the castle of Princess Hervör's father, King Hundingr. Hundingr compels Hjálmþér to complete three impossible tasks, and he is only able to successfully perform them by having the slave Hörðr do them for him. Eventually, the three men escape with Hervör, and her father Hundingr pursues them but is defeated in a battle. Then the slave Hörðr dies suddenly, and Hjálmþér carries his dead body on his back for three days, until the corpse disappears mysteriously.

Their number now reduced to two, Hjálmþér and Ölvir come to a city, where a king, who looks suspiciously much like Hörðr, reigns. Now it is revealed that Hjálmþér is not the first stepson Lúða has tried to seduce. The slave Hörðr is actually king Hringr of Arabia, and Lúða has transformed him into an ugly slave, who can only be freed from his enchantment if someone allows him to have his way in everything, and carries his dead body on his back for three days. Lúða has also transformed Hringr's sisters into a giantess and a *finngálkn* respectively, and they also regain their true form. Hringr's sisters marry Hjálmþér and Ölvir, and king Hringr marries princess Hervör.

Lúða and the *empousa*

It seems to me that the figure of Lúða shares certain traits with the *empousa* of Corinth as described in Flavius Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*, and I will begin by examining these as they are the ones to be first actualised in the saga. The *Life of Apollonius*, written in Greek and published after 217 CE (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. Philostrati), presents the travels and wonders performed by the Neo-Pythagorean sage Apollonius of Tyana. The most famous of his wonders in Antiquity was the defeat of the *empousa* of Corinth (Flavius Philostratus *Vita Apollonii*, 4.25). Before we turn to this story, however, let us take a look at King Ingi's first encounter with Lúða:

> …lidu nu länger tijmar, þar til at þad bar til eirnn dag snemma er sölinn var biart skijnande, ad könginum vard lited til siäfarins, hann sier eirnn lijten bät bruna ad landenu, hann var sem gull älits. K(öngur) jhugar mjóg þessa sijn. Tveir menn voru ä skipinu. K(öngur) reikjar þä ofann til strandar med mikille sturlan, og ähiggiu, hugsande huorsu verólldin mätte brygd verda, hann sä mann eirnn af skipinu gänga, og bar konu eina ä hende sinne, forkunnar væna, so ad k(öngur) þöttest óngua slijka sied hafa ad allre kurteyse, og skórugleik, og rann honum þegar mikill ästarhugur til hennar, og heilsar henne blijdlega. (*Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* ch. 1, p. 5, ll. 23–p. 6, ll. 11)[1]
>
> A long time now passed, until early one day, in the bright sunshine, the king happened to look towards the sea. He sees a little boat advancing towards land with the speed of fire. It was just as gold in appearance. The king mused much on this sight. Two people were on the ship. The

[1] All quotations from *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* are based on Richard Harris's 1970 edition. I am very grateful to Professor Harris for giving his permission to use it, and to Professor Matthew Driscoll for generously sharing his copy with me.

> king wanders down to the shore with much despair and anxiety, thinking how the world could be so unsafe. He saw a man going ashore. He carried on his arm a woman so exceedingly fair to behold that the king thought he had not seen anyone with such grace and nobility, and at once great love for her sprang up within him, and he greeted her gently. (Tr. Camilla Asplund Ingemark)

Here Lúða and her companion emerge from that treacherous element, the sea. Lúða then tells the king the tale of her woes, stating that her husband was murdered by the savage king of Serkland, who wanted her to marry him instead; this is in fact a lie, since Lúða murdered her husband all by herself. She then claims to have fled with a slave, Hörðr, and now surrenders herself to the king, on condition that he take her as a wedded wife, not a concubine. Soon after the wedding, however, her true nature starts to shine through: "…leid og ei längt ädur enn madur huarf huória nött, og þötte þetta mórgum kynlegt" ('Not long passed, before a man vanished every night, and many considered this strange,' *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* ch. 1, p. 7, ll. 12–13). Lúða is quite literally a man-eater, as was the Ancient *empousa*, who tried to snare the young philosophy student Menippus:

> Ἐρᾶσθαι δὲ τὸν Μένιππον οἱ πολλοὶ ᾠοντο ὑπὸ γυναίου ξένου, τὸ δὲ γύναιον καλή τε ἐφαίνετο καὶ ἱκανῶς ἁβρὰ καὶ πλουτεῖν ἔφασκεν, οὐδὲν δὲ τούτων ἄρα ἀτεχνῶς ἦν, ἀλλὰ ἐδόκει πάντα. κατὰ γὰρ τὴν ὁδὸν τὴν ἐπὶ Κεγχρεὰς βαδίζοντι αὐτῷ μόνῳ φάσμα ἐντυχὸν γυνή τε ἐγένετο καὶ χεῖρα ξυνῆψεν ἐρᾶν αὐτοῦ πάλαι φάσκουσα, Φοίνισσα δὲ εἶναι καὶ οἰκεῖν ἐν προαστείῳ τῆς Κορίνθου […] ἔμπουσά τε εἶναι ἔφη καὶ πιαίνειν ἡδοναῖς τὸν Μένιππον ἐς βρῶσιν τοῦ σώματος, τὰ γὰρ καλὰ τῶν σωμάτων καὶ νέα σιτεῖσθαι ἐνόμιζεν, ἐπειδὴ ἀκραιφνὲς αὐτοῖς τὸ αἷμα. (Flavius Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* [Life of Apollonius], 4.25.2, 4.25.5)[2]
>
> Many believed this Menippus was loved by a foreign woman; this little woman seemed beautiful and befittingly dainty, and she said she was rich; but she was really none of these things, but it just seemed that way. For as he was walking all alone along the road to Cenchreae, he encountered an apparition which was a woman, and seizing his hand she said she had loved him for a long time, and that she was a Phoenician and lived in a suburb of Corinth […] she said she was an *empousa* and that she was fattening up Menippus with pleasures until eating his body, for she used to feed on beautiful and young bodies, as their blood is pure. (Tr. Camilla Asplund Ingemark)

The *empousa* and Lúða are both characterised as foreign women; the *empousa* pretends to be Phoenician, Lúða claims to be Greek. Both are dazzlingly beautiful and easily capture the fancy of their victims. Both are essentially man-eating creatures, feeding on the bodies of men, though Lúða appears to be more indiscriminate in her choice of meal. It is also unlikely that her ultimate design is to eat the king – his blood might not be young enough – though she is not averse to the thought of killing him in order to replace him with a younger paramour.

[2] In accordance with the convention in Classics, works by Classical authors are not listed in the bibliography.

Both women are encountered in a public and liminal space, on the seashore and on the road to a harbour respectively, and both offer themselves in marriage to the man they meet. In the Graeco-Roman world, this would have been absolutely unthinkable for an honest woman: she would never address a man openly in the street, much less proposition him then and there; this kind of behaviour was expressly reserved for courtesans (Asplund Ingemark and Ingemark 2020, 144). In effect, she thereby betrays her status as an abnormal woman. Furthermore, marriages were contracted by the heads of the respective families, not by the young people themselves. In medieval Iceland, this kind of parental consent was still vital, even when the ecclesiastical doctrine of mutual consent on the parts of husband and wife had gained ground (Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir 2001, 176–78). In king Ingi's case, parental consent is not an issue as he is the head of his household, but marrying someone you met just a few minutes ago, as the king does, would still be considered rather rash.

Lúða and Phaedra

Lúða's attempted seduction of her stepson is a justly celebrated passage in the saga, particularly for its rhetorical flourishes (O'Connor 2006, 56). It has parallels in other Old Icelandic sagas, for example, the attempted seduction by queen Hvít of her stepson Björn in *Hrólfs saga kraka* chapter 25, but the scene is not particularly fleshed out there. Incidentally, queen Hvít is another dangerous woman encountered on a desolate shore, this time in a cottage in remote Finnmark; indeed, she is not even a woman, but a troll (*Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 24, ch. 26). Ármann Jakobsson has also pointed to the resemblance of the passage in *Hrólfs saga kraka* with Aarne Thompson (AT) type 870B* *Princess Sews for False Bride* (Ármann Jakobsson 2003, 183), a taletype only attested in Iceland. Here, I will read the corresponding passage in *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* as an evocation of the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytos.

In *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, the passage in question runs as follows:

> drottning m(ællte) þä so, huornin lijst þier ä mig edur þycker þier eg ekki kuennleg og kurteijs, vel vijst s(eiger) H(iälmþér) hun m(ællte): huij mun mier so veralldarhiöled [hamingjuhjólit] vallt orded, hälffu betur hefde ockur saman vered hendt, üngum og hreinlegum, og til allrar nätüru skapfelldlegum, og heijr minn sæte og kiære, þad mä eg þier satt seigia, ad þinn fader hefur mier eckj spilt, af þui ad hann er madur óruasa, og nätürulaus, og til ógra huijlubragda fær, enn eg hefer mióg breijskt lijf, og mikla näturu i mijnum kuennlegum limu[m], so ad þad er miked tiön verólldinne, ad suo lystelegur lijkame skal spenna so gamlann mann, sem þinn fader er, og meiga ei blömgast heiminum til vpphelldis, mættum vid helldur ockar üngu lijkame saman tempra, efter nätürlegre holldsins girnd, so ad þeir mætte fagurlega äuaxtast, enn vid mættum skiött gióra räd firer þessum gamla kale, so ad hann giórde ockur óngua skapraun, H(iälmþer) m(ællte) er þier þetta aluara s(eiger) hann, ad vijsu s(eiger) hun, þad ætlade eg s(eiger) H(iälmþer) ad þu munder jll vera, enn alldre so suijuirdeleg sem nu veit eg ad þu ert. Hann hratt hennj þä framm yfer borded, og slö ä hennar naser, so blöd fiell vm hana alla. Lwdä m(ællte] vid skulum finnast j annad sinn H(iälmþer) hann quad hana þui ei fegna skyllde verda. Sóck hun þä þar nidur i jórdina sem hun var komin… (*Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* ch. 6, p. 20, ll.7–p. 21, ll. 8)

> The queen then said: How do you perceive me, do you not find me womanly and courteous?
>
> Well sure, says Hjalmther.
>
> She said: Why should the wheel of Fortune have turned thus for me? It would have been better for us to be together, young and chaste and equal in our desire. And listen my sweet love, I can truthfully tell you that your father has not yet ruined me, since he is a decrepit and impotent man, and not capable of any cohabitation. But my character is weak and I have much passion in my womanly limbs. It is such a loss to the world that so lusty a body must clasp so old a man as your father, and cannot flourish to uphold the world. Oh that we might rather blend our young bodies together in accordance with our natural carnal desires, so that they might bring forth fair fruit. But we must quickly make a plan for this old man, so that he will not give us trouble.
>
> Hjalmther said: Are you serious? he says.
>
> Indeed, she says.
>
> I did think, says Hjalmther, that you might be wicked, but never so heinous as I now know you are.
>
> He pushed her away from the table and hit her on the nose, so that blood fell all over her.
>
> Luda said: We will meet another time.
>
> Hjalmther told her she would not rejoice in it. Then she sank down into the earth, just as she had come. (Tr. Camilla Asplund Ingemark)

Lúða's affinities with Phaedra have certainly been remarked upon before; when O'Connor wrote his article "'Stepmother Sagas:' An Irish Analogue for *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ölvers*," he was very circumspect about claiming any direct impact of the Phaedra and Hippolytus story on the saga (O'Connor 2000, 19–23). Personally, I do not see much point in emphasising her Greek origin, if this were not the case. The legend of Phaedra and Hippolytos is the best-known example of the many extant Ancient Greek and Roman variants of this legend. It has been characterised as the most productive of ancient plots in the Mediterranean culture area, and occurs with twenty different sets of characters in Graeco-Roman literature (Hansen 2002, 332). Many of these include the motif of incest, as in the story of Phaedra and Hippolytus, and several are indebted to it as a prototype or paragon.

A neat summary of the plot is to be found in the first- or second-century mythographer Apollodorus' *Library of Greek Mythology*, which is a work summarising central Greek myths. The text cited is included in the *Epitome*, the last section of the work, which is given an independent title and numbering:

> Φαίδρα δὲ γεννήσασα Θησεῖ δύο παιδία Ἀκάμαντα καὶ Δημοφῶντα ἐρᾷ τοῦ ἐκ τῆς Ἀμαζόνος παιδὸς [ἤγουν τοῦ Ἱππολύτου] καὶ δεῖται συνελθεῖν αὐτῇ. ὁ δὲ μισῶν πάσας γυναῖκας τὴν συνουσίαν ἔφυγεν. ἡ δὲ Φαίδρα, δείσασα μὴ τῷ πατρὶ διαβάλῃ,

> κατασχίσασα τὰς τοῦ θαλάμου θύρας καὶ τὰς ἐσθῆτας σπαράξασα κατεψεύσατο Ἱππολύτου βίαν. Θησεὺς δὲ πιστεύσας ηὔξατο Ποσειδῶνι Ἱππόλυτον διαφθαρῆναι· ὁ δέ, θέοντος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἅρματος καὶ παρὰ τῇ θαλάσσῃ ὀχουμένου, ταῦρον ἀνῆκεν ἐκ τοῦ κλύδωνος. πτοηθέντων δὲ τῶν ἵππων κατηρράχθη τὸ ἅρμα. ἐμπλακεὶς δὲ <ταῖς ἡνίαις> Ἱππόλυτος συρόμενος ἀπέθανε. γενομένου δὲ τοῦ ἔρωτος περιφανοῦς ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησε Φαίδρα. (Apollodorus *Epitome*, 1.18–19).
>
> Phaedra, having borne two children, Acamas and Demophon, to Theseus, was in love with the son he had with the Amazon, that is to say, Hippolytus, and begged him to have intercourse with her. He, hating all women, fled her company. Phaedra, fearing he might slander her to his father, cleft asunder the bedroom doors and tore her clothing to feign violence on Hippolytus' part. Theseus believed her and prayed to Poseidon that Hippolytus might be destroyed. As he was riding in his chariot and driving by the sea, [Poseidon] sent a bull out of the waves. The horses were scared and the chariot broken into pieces. Entangled in the reins, Hippolytus was dragged along to his death. When her love became manifest, Phaedra hung herself. (Tr. Camilla Asplund Ingemark)

We may note that Hippolytus meets his death on the shore, that liminal space where the god of the sea can reach him while still on land. The theme of seduction by the stepmother is the same in both stories, but Lúða never accuses Hjálmþér of rape to his father; she prefers to take her revenge by magic. As Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (1995) has observed, stepmothers and curses (*álög*) are intimately associated with each other in Iceland. The end result is nevertheless expected to be the same: Hjálmþér should ideally perish in his quest for the fair princess Hervör, and the evil character of her father, the sorcerer king Hundingr, is supposed to guarantee that.

Lúða's eloquent speech, its plaintive tone in particular, is also quite reminiscent of Phaedra's rhetorics in Ovid's *Heroides*, the collection of love letters purportedly sent by famous Greek women to their beloved. In Ovid's version, all modesty in Phaedra has fled, and she is just as brazenly flirtatious as Lúða is. The *Heroides* was probably known and read in medieval Iceland. In the thirteenth-century bishop's saga *Jóns saga helga*, chapter 13, a passage indicates that Klængur Þorsteinsson, the future bishop of Skálholt, in his youth read a book called *Ovidius epistolarum*, consisting of "mansöngr mikill," a great love song. As Ralph O'Connor (2000, 23) concedes, it is very tempting to infer that this book was indeed the *Heroides*. In my opinion, this would be the only reasonable interpretation, if we are to take the genre designation of "letters" seriously. Ovid wrote two works in epistolary form, and it would seem rather far-fetched to pass off *Letters from the Black Sea* (*Epistulae ex Ponto*) as a great love song, unless you have a very twisted sense of humour; these are the letters he wrote to his family and friends from his exile in far-off Tomis.

However, things are not that simple, as there are two different readings of this particular passage in the manuscripts of *Jóns saga helga*, one positing *Ovidius de arte* rather than *Ovidius epistolarum* as the book Klængur Þorsteinsson read, in all probability referring to the *Ars amandi* (Sigurður Pétursson 1988, 55–56). Yet by the fourteenth century, we find evidence of direct influence from Ovid – also from the *Heroides* – in Haukr Erlendsson's version of *Trójumanna saga*, recounting the history of Troy in his

Hauksbók, compiled in 1265–1334 (Sigurður Pétursson 1988, 57–58; Bedogni 2022). This indicates that some Icelanders knew Ovid and his works by then.

Lúða's speech has been characterised as "incongruously learned-sounding" (O'Connor 2000, 22), which it might be. The imagery of the wheel of fortune is reminiscent of a passage in Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, where the personified Philosophia gently chides him for wanting to halt the ever-revolving wheel of fortune: if the wheel stops, fortune as such is no more (Boethius *De consolatione philosophiae*, 2.1.19). Boethius' work was known in medieval Iceland (Bartusik 2019, 108), and could have provided some of the inspiration for Lúða's complaint.

To return to Lúða and Phaedra, since their respective situations are quite different, the details of their speeches differ too, but both lament their harsh fates, being bound to an impotent old man in Lúða's case, and in Phaedra's, the burden of a curse that seems to lie over the female members of her family, as the following quotation demonstrates:

Forsitan hunc generis fato reddamus amorem
et Venus ex tota gente tributa petat.
Juppiter Europen – prima est ea gentis origo –
dilexit tauro dissimulante deum.
Pasiphae mater, decepto subdita tauro,
enixa est utero crimen onusque suo.
Perfidus Aegides, ducentia fila secutus,
curva meae fugit tecta sororis ope.
En ego nunc, ne forte parum Minoia credar,
in socias leges ultima gentis eo!
(Ovid *Heroides*, 4.53–62)
Perhaps I must suffer the fate of our line, this passion
and Venus seek tribute from the entire family.
Jupiter loved Europa – she is the first progenitor of our line –
while the god assumed the form of a bull.
My mother Pasiphae, falsely deceiving the bull
brought forth from her womb the burden of her offence.
The faithless son of Aegeus [Theseus], following the guiding thread,
escaped the winding labyrinth with my sister's aid.
Behold, I, that I should not be thought too little a daughter of Minos,
enter the covenant of my kindred, as the last of my line.
(Tr. Camilla Asplund Ingemark)

It has been stated that Phaedra is not only an obsessively passionate woman herself, but she comes from a family of such women, her mother Pasiphae, who gave birth to the Minotaur, being the ultimate exemplar (Hansen 2002, 337). Implicitly, Lúða also does so, since she is a troll. As Sandra Ballif Straubhaar has stressed, *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* tends to portray troll women as wanton creatures, characterised by immodest dress, immoderate speech and considerable sexual forwardness; other sagas also confirm this picture. This sexual aggressiveness is a crucial token of their Otherness, and ultimately of their non-human character which makes their total annihilation acceptable and indeed desirable, as Ballif Straubhaar suggests (Straubhaar 2001, 118).

Lúða as *empousa* and Lúða as Phaedra

If we take the evocation of Phaedra in the figure of Lúða seriously, Straubhaar's assertion becomes more problematic. Phaedra, for all her faults, and the somewhat monstrous sexual appetites of some of her kin, is fully human (Hansen 2002, 160). Reading Lúða and Phaedra as intertextually connected in the saga, Lúða, for all her trollishness, is humanised. Even though she receives her punishment in the end, we are left to wonder whether it actually was as just as it is made out to be. Simultaneously, the intertextual link to the *empousa* pulls us in the opposite direction, stressing her non-human features. It seems to me that these opposing tendencies, Lúða as *empousa* and Lúða as Phaedra, contribute to the complexity of her character.

It is obvious to me that the impact of Graeco-Roman myth on sagas such as *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* merit more scholarly attention in the future. Closer scrutiny of the shore as a setting for supernatural encounters would also be pertinent in the study of this saga, as many of them, not examined here, take place by water.

Bibliography

Aarne, Antti, and Stith Thompson. 1987. *The Types of the Folktale*. FF Communications 184. Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir. 1995. "Stjúpur í vondu skapi" [Stepmothers in a bad mood]. *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 56, no. 3: 25–36.

Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir. 2001. "Marriage in the Middle Ages: Canon Law and Nordic Family Relations." In *Rapporter til Det 24. Nordiske Historikermøde, Århus 9.–13. august 2001*. Vol. 1: Norden og Europa i middelalderen [Reports on the 24th Congress of Nordic Historians, Århus 9th–13th August 2001. Vol. 1.: The North and Europe in the Middle Ages], edited by Per Ingesman and Thomas Lindkvist, 174–202. Jysk Selskab for Historie.

Ármann Jakobsson. 2003. "Queens of Terror: Perilous Women in *Hálfs saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*." In *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9.2001* [The structure and ideology of the *fornaldarsögur:* Proceedings of a symposium in Uppsala on 2nd September 2001], edited by Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, 173–89. Institutionen för nordiska språk.

Asplund Ingemark, Camilla, and Dominic Ingemark. 2020. *Representations of Fear: Verbalising Emotion in Ancient Roman Folk Narrative*. FF Communications 320. Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Bagerius, Henric. 2009. "Mandom och mödom: Sexualitet, homosocialitet och aristokratisk identitet på det senmedeltida Island" [Manhood and virginity: Sexuality, homosociality and aristocratic identity in Late Medieval Iceland]. Ph.D. diss., Göteborgs universitet.

Bartusik, Grzegorz. 2019. "Cultural Transfer of Cognitive Structures of Fortune in the Latin and Old Icelandic Literatures and Languages: The Case of the Metaphor

Fortune is a Wheel." In *Social Norms in Medieval Scandinavia*, edited by Jakub Morawiec et al., 103–38. Arc Humanities Press.

Bedogni, Beatrice. 2022. "Ovid, Vergil, Dares and Haukr: The Story of the Trojan War in 14th-Century Icelandic Literature." *Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies* 5: 28–64.

Glad, Clarence E. 2011. "The Greco-Roman Heritage and Image Construction in Iceland 1830–1918." In *Iceland and Images of the North*, edited by Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson with the collaboration of Daniel Chartier, 67–113. Presses de l'Université du Québec and ReykjavíkurAkademían.

Gunnell, Terry. 2005. "Eddic Poetry." In *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, edited by Rory McTurk, 82–100. Blackwell.

———. 2017. "On the Border: The Liminality of the Sea Shore in Icelandic Folk Legends of the Past." In *Northern Atlantic Islands and the Sea*: *Seascapes and Dreamscapes*, edited by Andrew Jennings, Silke Reeploeg and Angela Watt, 10–31. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

———, et al. 2013. "Why Should Folklore Students Study 'Dead' Legends?" *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 69: 171–209.

———. 2016. "Eddic Performance and Eddic Audiences." In *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, edited by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn, 92–113. Cambridge University Press.

Hansen, William. 2002. *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*. Cornell University Press.

Harris, Richard L. 1970. "*Hjálmþérs saga:* A Scientific Edition." Ph.D. diss. University of Iowa.

———. 2017. Hjálmþés saga ok Ǫlvis – HjǪ. *Skaldic Project*. https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&v=intro&i=49 accessed 5 May 2024.

Lavender, Philip. 2018. "Herodotus in Rhyme." In *Gott skálkaskjól veitt Gottskálki Jenssyni sextugum 4. apríl 2018*, 72–74. Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen.

O'Connor, Ralph. 2000. "'Stepmother Sagas:' An Irish Analogue for *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ölvers*." *Scandinavian Studies* 72, no. 1: 1–48.

———. 2006. *Icelandic Histories & Romances*. Tempus.

Oxford Classical Dictionary. 2012. *Oxford Classical Dictionary* 4th ed., edited by Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth and Esther Eidinow. Oxford University Press.

Sigurður Pétursson. 1988. "Ovid in Iceland." In *Cultura classica e cultura germanica settentrionale*, edited by Pietro Janni, Diego Poli and Carlo Santini, 53–63. Editrice Herder.

Straubhaar, Sandra Ballif. 2001. "Nasty, Brutish, and Large: Cultural Difference and Otherness in the Figuration of the Trollwomen of the *fornaldar sögur*." *Scandinavian Studies* 73, no. 2: 105–24.

OLD NORSE WORLDS IN *THE NORTHMAN*

Neil Price*

Author's note: This article contains plot spoilers for The Northman

In the northern spring of 2022, an epic movie set in the tenth century was released to critical acclaim amidst the slow pandemic recovery. Together with several colleagues including Terry Gunnell and Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, I was privileged to work as a historical advisor on *The Northman*, directed by Robert Eggers, which I believe to be the most careful recreation so far attempted of the time generally known as the Viking Age (Abrams 2022). The film is already several years old when you read this, but I have chosen it as the theme for my contribution to this book for three specific reasons. The first is Terry's involvement; his work – in the form of folklore, religion, ritual, performance, and perspectives on Icelandic culture – saturates the movie's visual feel, distilling his scholarship in a wholly new context. The second is the way in which *The Northman* inadvertently became a resonant touchstone for where we are in Viking studies in the third decade of the twenty-first century, prompting interesting responses from its many publics and also from within academia. The third is the profound and unexpected impact that my engagement with the movie has had on my own professional outlook, in ways that will become apparent. (It will also be obvious that I am positively inclined to the movie, a bias of a kind, which should be borne in mind throughout.)

I will not rehash the full plot here, but *The Northman* is broadly based on a story that was already old when it was written down by the twelfth-century Danish historian Saxo 'the Grammarian' – the tale of the Norse prince Amleth, though of course, we know him better by the name under which he appeared four hundred years later still in one of the greatest works of English literature: Hamlet. We encounter Amleth first as a boy at the end of the ninth century, on the fictional North Atlantic island of Hrafnsey which is ruled by his beloved father, King Aurvandil. After a ritual initiation into the honour-bound codes of fate and his family history, Amleth witnesses Aurvandil's murder at the

* University of Uppsala.

hands of the latter's brother, Fjölnir, who also carries off Amleth's mother, Gudrún. As young Amleth flees the island in a small boat, he swears revenge, and we next encounter him as an adult many years later, raiding in Garðaríki, where he has grown to become a savage *berserkr*. After a sorceress reminds him of his oath of vengeance, the rest of the movie traces Amleth's implacable campaign of destruction against Fjölnir and his new family in Iceland.

Eggers' two previous films – *The Witch* (2015) and *The Lighthouse* (2019) – were both New England period pieces, set in the early seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries respectively. In the publicity round leading up to *The Northman*'s cinema release, a journalist asked him why all his movies dealt with the past (Knight 2022, 26). Eggers answered with a quote from the Restoration poet John Dryden's *Fables, Ancient and Modern*, "For mankind is ever the same and nothing lost out of nature, though everything is altered." It was clear that *The Northman* was never going to be a conventional Hollywood historical drama.

A key feature of Eggers' work has always been an intense, almost obsessive commitment to authenticity, with every detail of costume and setting minutely researched. His close team has remained largely unchanged throughout, built around production designer Craig Lathrop, costume designer Linda Muir, the luminous photography of Jarin Blaschke, and editing by Louise Ford. Both team and approach continued on *The Northman*, striving for unprecedented levels of exactitude, but with the full awareness that this can and should be critically challenged. As Eggers himself put it in 2021, observing that much of what we know about Norse clothing comes from burials, "we could be on the right track, but it could be that if a Viking-Age person saw this movie, the first thing they'd ask would be *why is everyone dressed like dead people?"*

Crucially, all the consultants were contacted by the producers in a proactive, personal sense – because Eggers and his co-writer Sjón had read our work, found it aligned with what they wished to do, and then asked us if we would like to contribute. For my part, within a few days of them reaching out to my agent, I was on a Zoom call with the director. My book *The Viking Way* (Price 2019) and Terry's many publications had been a source of ideas for them, and the then-unpublished manuscript of *Children of Ash and Elm* (Price 2020a) was a basic reference on set; Alexander Skarsgård very kindly referred to it in interviews as his 'Viking bible.'

My contributions took the form of online conversations and emailed attachments (I sent hundreds of annotated photos to Craig and Linda, on aspects of Norse dress, material culture, and iconography), followed up by a personal visit during pre-production at the Belfast studios. The sheer attention to detail had to be seen to be believed: the hand-carved models for the ornamented timbers; the faithful recreations of ships, down to the rivets and the figureheads, even those only seen in the distance on-screen; the digital concept art, hundreds of images each of which could function as a commissioned reconstruction in an academic context; the architectural drawings of halls and other buildings, supported by 3D models; the wonderful sets, such as the reused prehistoric chamber tomb (partly based on Maeshowe) where young Amleth's initiation takes place; the massive workshops solely devoted to sewing clothing and manufacturing armour; the warehouse of weaponry, with a choice of 3D-printed sword

hilts – and on and on. Producer Lars Knudsen was happy to note that I had to physically sit down to recover from the scale and quality of the work being done. Covid sadly prevented the consultants' on-set presence during the shoot, but the questions kept coming as filming progressed. I recall one occasion when I got a mobile call while at the supermarket, asking how sources of light should be positioned in a hall, only to realise that the cast and crew were actually standing on the set, ready to roll as soon as the lamps were placed out.

The matter of 'accuracy' in historical drama is a frequent question from the public and a focus of critique from academics, though the latter often hedge the necessary discussion of what such authenticity really means in practice (as opposed to readings that merely do not follow the critic's favoured interpretations). I have written of this elsewhere, in the context of my experiences as a consultant on other productions, for documentaries and streaming dramas (Price 2020b). *The Northman* was widely praised for the richness of its production and costume design, but also raised some serious debate about how the world of the early medieval Norse may really have looked and felt, how we might know that, and not least about how we relate to it now. In particular, the movie and its reception highlighted how culturally entangled the image of the Vikings has always been, a filter not just for the concerns of the twenty-first century, but stretching far back in time.

The particular focus of Eggers' attention – and the reason why he engaged both me and Terry – was a concern for emic depictions of the Norse pre-Christian mindset. A particular worldview specific to the time was also a major component of his previous movies, and *The Northman* followed their lead in presenting this simultaneously as perceived reality and as experience that could, if one were so inclined, be 'explained' in other ways. On-screen for the Viking Age, in a very selective list, this takes the form of hallucinogenic visions; initiation ceremonies; a mound-dwelling revenant; a queer seer and a blind seeress; *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar*, and the rituals that empower them; chanted spells; dance and performance; animal fetches; sung poetry; divine genealogies; cult buildings; *blót*; mythic iconography in timber, stone, and textiles; *hamingjur*; human funerary killing and sacrifice; raven messengers; *valkyrjur*; the material workings of fate; rites of Óðinn and Freyr; a naked swordfight on an erupting volcano; and a literal belief (really, knowledge) of Hel, Valhǫll and Yggdrasil as tangible things. All this also crosses boundaries of culture in the Norse and Slavic worlds, with other ethnicities deeper in the mix. You want to see it again now, don't you?

While I obviously hoped the film would succeed at the box office, I confess to also enjoying the puzzlement that it engendered in some viewers and critics, perhaps especially among academics. This was connected to what was, for me, the key feature of the movie, namely the fact that it made a serious attempt to present a past world entirely on its inhabitants' terms. In my opinion, one of the triumphs of Eggers' achievement was his deliberate choice to withhold exposition, explaining nothing that was already known to his characters. *The Northman* is a complex film of many layers, and some of its finer points, while hardly concealed, are deliberately submerged to create atmosphere without clumsy elucidation. Few noticed, for example, the fact that the word 'Viking' is

never used. Events, rituals, and dialogue references similarly unfold in front of the viewer without clarification. As one reviewer put it, the only options are "either go with it, jump to your own conclusions, or Google it when you get home" (Baldock 2022). The result is something that does not quite give anyone the Vikings that they think they want, but rather conjures an image of a long-vanished time that in no way panders to our sensibilities or comfort. Put simply, we are spectators and visitors, "trespassers on this personal tale" (ibid), nothing more. The people of Eggers' Viking Age do not care in the slightest what we think of them, their moral codes are emphatically not ours, and nothing in the movie tells us how we should respond to their behaviour. In historical drama of any kind, and increasingly also in academic studies, this is astonishingly rare – but it is integral to the kind of history I want to write. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the director's approach helped to clarify my research thinking in ways that had eluded me for years.

The (Ab)uses of the Past

Almost inevitably, some of Eggers' intentions were (deliberately) misconstrued, and there were early confrontations with the kind of political extremism that has long overshadowed aspects of Viking reception and legacy. Based on the trailer, even before the film's release, far-right groups began acclaiming the movie online as depicting 'pure raw masculinity' and 'restoring pride in our people,' prompting a piece in *The Guardian* disingenuously titled "Are white supremacists reading too much into The Northman?" (Rose 2022). Given that the same liberal newspaper had earlier given the film a five-star review (Bradshaw 2022), which it presumably does not award to far-right propaganda, this clickbait-for-progressives headline did a lazy disservice to the hundreds of people who worked on the production. This was even acknowledged in the article's opening paragraphs, clarifying how early, strongly and repeatedly Eggers had spoken out against potential right-wing misappropriations, even to the point of admitting a kind of general allergy to the Vikings for that reason. However, the journalist's real point was to advocate for intentionally creating an image of the Viking-Age past that the far right would hate, and suggesting that anyone who did not do so was naively complicit. By way of positive example, he cited Taika Waititi's Thor movies for Marvel, with non-white valkyries and gods, and female subversion of masculine symbols such as the hammer Mjǫllnir – exactly the same observation made by some academics (e.g., Larrington 2023, 117–22).

But why not mention *The Northman*'s non-binary seer, played by a bearded actor (Icelandic icon Ingvar Eggert Sigurðsson) clearly wearing the oval brooches and clothing associated with Viking-Age femininity? The identity of this character is not explicitly stated, admittedly, but that is not the case with other aspects of the film. For example, instead of condescendingly describing Anya Taylor-Joy's character Olga as "the far-right male's dream woman: beautiful, fair-haired, loyal to her man and committed to bearing his offspring" (Rose 2022), why not note that Amleth's partner is a Slav, hardly the Nazi choice for the future of a Norse royal line? As Olga herself says, she also has the power "to break [men's] minds," her sorcery can control the elements, and at one

point she saves Amleth's life: the very opposite of a passive helpmeet. Why is *this* not undermining the Viking stereotype? One could cite many more examples, including the entire subtext of the film. There is a curious double-standard here, as expressed by Larrington (2023, 171):

> Many familiar Viking movie clichés are overturned or abandoned in *The Northman*'s vision of the early medieval past as radically strange; nevertheless, the film's aesthetic continues to celebrate the white, hypermasculine and uncompromisingly violent ideology that its narrative implicitly critiques.

I respect Larrington's opinion, but I think she is making the common mistake of conflating depiction with approval, or 'celebration' as she puts it. To take the movie's undoubted violence as an example, if morally inconvenient but historically prominent aspects of the times are never to be given any contextualised attention, this is actually just another form of projection onto the past – well-meaning, unlike that of the far right, but false nonetheless. This attitude also fails to understand that white supremacists and their familiars will selectively distort, misread and misappropriate whatever they wish to (including new terms put forward to replace old ones), regardless of what academics or film-makers express in their work. As a case in point, well, what *did* they make of the gender-fluid character who guides Amleth to his night blade and the vision necessary to fulfil his revenge? The answer is that this person was simply ignored, and probably not even recognised in the first place.

We should push back and not surrender the past to those who would abuse it, but that does not mean we should set our agendas solely in reaction to them (Price 2023).

As to whether depicting the worst sides of the Viking Age should be avoided if the topic itself might appeal to those with views to match, in this light we can consider *The Northman*'s arguably most distressing sequence: the carnage of the raid on a Slav village, which is also the first time we meet Amleth as an adult. Although the scene contains several edits, it is cut to appear as a single, continuous shot in constant motion, filmed at eye level and thus placing the viewer uncomfortably close. In a dawn assault as the village is waking up, its people are slaughtered, violated, enslaved, while the elderly, children, and others deemed surplus to requirements are locked in a building and burned alive. The settlement itself is left as a smoking ruin. Front and centre in this nightmare, as one of its main perpetrators, is Amleth, the nominal 'hero' of the tale. We have previously seen him as a traumatised child, but encounter him now as a ruthless berserker, killer and enslaver, who has clearly acted in this way for a very long time – at a visibly and literally dehumanising cost: clad in a pelt, he howls like a wolf and tears out a man's throat with his teeth. As the *úlfheðnar* come down from their murderous frenzy, the leader compliments Amleth (using his adopted berserker name), who appears dulled and listless:

HRÓLFUR SPLIT-LIP
These savages are fine chattel, eh Björnulfr? We did good.

AMLETH
(low, emotionless)
Never better …

BERSERKER PRIEST
(laughs)
When we found you as a cub, I knew then you had a heart of cold iron.

Amleth looks away from him.[1]

Even the 'cub' remark emphasises that the warriors have treated him as an animal and potential predator from the time they encountered him in childhood. The raid scene is unrelentingly and deliberately horrific, something that nobody in their proper mind could watch and come away thinking that Vikings were 'cool.' They are the opposite of role models, impossible to admire – which is the point. A scene like this transmits a message to all those who are *not* already corrupted by far-right ideology, because sadly those who are will be unreachable: it makes an important argument while also serving the film's narrative arc. The violence is intentionally sickening, but can any Viking specialist honestly say that this is not what the raids were like, or that this scene did not play out in reality many hundreds of times? What kind of Viking Age are we really communicating if such things are suppressed? None of which is to ignore that there are many other kinds of stories to tell from that era.

So yes, Robert Eggers could have made a family-friendly PG-certificate action movie (can you *imagine*?), or included the Hulk, or produced a sort of Norse *Bridgerton* (which I would absolutely watch, by the way), but let us not pretend that this remotely equates to a genuine prehistoric world. Fantasy can make a powerful statement, and I'm a fan of Waititi's take on Thor both for its humour and politics; I agree with the critics there. But that becomes a lie if what you wish or claim to do is to depict the past as you think it may really have been – in full acknowledgement of how difficult that is to achieve, or to look at – and furthermore a past that does not pander to *anyone's* preference. On a different note, Eggers could have filmed an equally authentic tale of the Viking Age set in the far more cosmopolitan, multicultural and diverse milieu of, say, Byzantium; but why should he not make an Icelandic movie if that's what he wants to do? There is room for all. The critics are making a serious and important point, but I think at times evade its implications. *The Northman* is not part of an entertaining franchise like *Thor: Ragnarok*, nor is it a Viking *Braveheart*, but something entirely more difficult and demanding.

[1] Excerpted from the unpublished screenplay, by kind permission of Robert Eggers.

Nuance in *The Northman*

The (super)natural elements in the film are obviously close to my own research interests, but I was more excited to see how Eggers challenged the clichés of the Viking Age while at the same time showing the realities on which they are based. At first glance, the film's tagline *Conquer Your Fate* sounds like standard Hollywood fare, but it in fact captures the tragic core of the plot – the contrast between Amleth's own perception that he cannot cut the threads that the *nornir* have spun for him, and what seems obvious to us, that he can do so at any time just by making different choices. As Karen Bek-Pedersen has observed (2011), the fatalism of the Norse encompassed free will, in that a person's decisions led to what they always, inevitably would become.

Both Eggers and Sjón are *very* well-read in the Old Norse texts, and often brought up *þættir* and other sources that I had forgotten. Early on, Eggers told me that if I ever had academic qualms about one of his creative decisions, especially if he consciously departed from the consultants' advice, then I should view the story approach as that of a legendary saga, not as one of the family sagas. It was helpful to hear, and illuminating of his process. This applied particularly to scenes of ritual practice, where the reality is quite simply uncertain. Here, the consultants offered suggestions for an imaginative recreation, building especially on Terry's life's work (Price 2022[2]) – but like the rest of the movie, the result was by Eggers' design. The power of narrative is very strong in the film. The people of the Viking Age inhabited an organic story-world in which tales changed in the telling: there was no static canon of Norse literature at the time. *The Northman* is not strictly Saxo, and certainly not *Hamlet*, but something different and unsettling all its own. At the end, the closing runic title card equates to *Amleðasaga*.

This is not the place for a full essay on the film, but suffice to list here a handful of features, most of which are not readily visible but add to the subliminal, full-immersion atmosphere:

- a serious attempt to imagine what the ritualised framework of the *berserkir* might have entailed, without the use of narcotics (for which there is no evidence whatsoever, despite popular perceptions; for the record, I also advised against depicting them in a different context later in the film!) and combining the latest theories of 'berserk-walking' (Dale 2022) with an embodiment of the so-called 'weapon dancers' and an interpretive choice to show them all as a genuine (and genuinely terrifying) fighting force; the movie also depicts their state of mind as they come out of their experience
- the blink-and-you'll-miss-it inclusion of a female warrior commander in the raid scene, based on the occupant of Birka grave Bj.581
- the omnipresence of two ravens, occurring in many scenes, never explicitly stated to be Huginn and Muninn, but …
- the centrality of slavery, depicted without sentiment in its harsh realities, including sexual exploitation by men with the knowledge of their wives;

[2] This paper includes a comprehensive listing of Terry's contributions, without doubt the enduring foundation texts of any study of Norse performance and materialised narratives.

without the audience ever being aware, the movie clearly depicts the different categories of people found in the Old Norse vocabularies of thraldom (Brink 2021, ch. 8), and the activities listed in *Rígsþula*; this is particularly important in emphasising the social contrasts of Norse culture – the actual *víkingar* (though never named as such) and the elites elevate themselves through their cults of war, but we also see those on the receiving end, those who just have to live alongside the consequences, or else are happy to share in the blood-soaked profits

- the dialogue, that emulates the laconic, slightly stilted rhythms of the sagas, including direct quotations such as the unsubtitled bawdy song from *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* as the thralls dance
- the importance of language, manifesting the multi-ethnic mix of thralls on Fjölnir's farm, including Picts, Scots, Irish, and Slavs, with accents to match; the Norse people's own speech takes on notes of theirs through living in close proximity; and Nicole Kidman's accent changes after Gudrún's secret as a former thrall is revealed when stress triggers a reversion to an original dialect long-since discarded
- the extraordinary detail of the mound-dweller's grave, in which everything is modelled on Vendel-period, rather than Viking-Age, originals, because the burial is old (this admittedly does not fit with the date of Iceland's settlement, but it is also an out-of-body experience in a halfway world); the sword *draugr* is based on the hilt from Valsgärde grave 7; the chronologically accurate runes on the blade are by Henrik Williams; the scene itself reproduces elements from several sagas
- the way in which the embroidered wall hangings from Aurvandil's hall (all hand-made, incidentally, based on the Oseberg and Överhogdal weaves) reappear in Fjölnir's farm, but have to be folded at the ends because he has come down in the world and his house is smaller
- the unexpected scholarly insight into the production process, when costume designer Linda Muir asked what the Norse would have worn to conduct *blót*, reasoning logically that they cannot possibly have covered their fine clothes in gore (something that had never occurred to me); she came up with special sacrificial cloaks, stained from past ceremonies
- the miniature Oseberg of Thorir's funeral, mixed with a slightly sanitised version of Ibn Faḍlān (who also crops up in the aftermath of the raid scene, with briefly glimpsed offering poles of wood, carved with human faces)
- the efforts taken to ensure that the valkyrie was not in any way sexualised; as Eggers put it to me, "we want a frightening figure who can throw Alexander Skarsgård over a horse."

And throughout it all, we see a central character who commits atrocities but does not regard them in that way; 'Vikings' that are impossible to like; a world in which the supernatural is taken seriously, as much a part of nature and everyday perception as the landscape itself; ritual as a constant of life; gendered ambiguities that go unremarked;

sexual politics that play out in female agency, and its limits; the blurred borders of humans and animals; a life course seen as universally uncertain and changeable, all filtered through the terrible implications of Fate's trap. In the cycle of the plot, Aurvandil ultimately emerges as no better than Fjölnir – though one wonders if this was always obvious to everyone except the hero-worshipping Amleth (the enslaved captives from the king's latest raid are seen at the very beginning of the film, and he boasts of those he has killed to obtain the treasures that his followers eagerly seize upon). As the drama ends, we are left pondering whether Amleth is totally deceived or completely fulfilled, and from whose perspective we should ask that question.

The film received an almost exclusively positive reaction from critics, appearing on nearly 40 'best of the year' lists. Across hundreds of reviews, it holds an aggregate of 90% on Rotten Tomatoes and a rating of 'universal acclaim' on Metacritic (both accessed 2024-08-04). The message seems to have got across, with reviewer after reviewer noting the movie's meditations on toxic masculinity, the pointlessness of being ruled by anger, the tragedy and monumental waste of Amleth's misguided priorities. Many felt it to be the director's best film, as one put it, his "non-macho masterpiece" (O'Sullivan 2022), a sentiment echoed widely. Importantly, a lighter side came through as well – among my favourites being "The vision Eggers aims for is the kind of 10th-century saga the Norse poets might have made themselves had they enjoyed access to a studio budget and Willem Dafoe" (Leigh 2022).

In this academic volume, perhaps the last word is best left to an academic reviewer, assessing the movie against the ambitions of people like myself and Terry, and most especially of course, Robert Eggers, Sjón, the cast and the crew (Nichols 2022):

> A film that appears to have had historical accuracy as its primary guiding principle, even when this means sacrificing popular images or myths of the Vikings, or when it comes at the cost of horrifying our modern sensibilities … the lengths to which *The Northman* goes to incorporate archaeological, literary, and mythological research—longstanding or cutting-edge—into its depiction of the Viking world. It is also a good example of what seems to have been the film's central philosophy: it is here to make your preconceptions of the Viking world look…well, quaint. And the result is spectacular … even the tiniest details are on point ... This authenticity often comes at the expense of relatability for modern audiences, but in this film that is a feature, not a flaw … the strongest point for *The Northman* is its unflinching portrayal of a society that was in so many ways completely alien to our own … This is a movie that refuses to flatter our modern conceptions of a) what the Vikings *were* like, or b) what we *want* the Vikings to have been like … *The Northman* is both incredibly bold and uncomfortable—it is, then, the film that self-proclaimed Viking enthusiasts deserve. However, I suspect it is also likely to upset many such Viking enthusiasts. It is unlikely to please the far-right political elements that valorise the Vikings as noble heroes—but it is equally unlikely to serve some bizarre modern efforts to reinvent the Vikings as a culture that was somehow "progressive". Instead, we see a people that are impossible to fit into our modern political persuasions at all. As it pans out, there are no heroes or villains in this piece: only characters with whom we can sympathise in certain moments, but would almost certainly recoil from were we to meet them in real life … In 2022, the more predictable approach might have been to portray the *society* as a brutal one, but with Amleth as a man ahead of his time—the audience insert who sees the wrongs of his society by our modern conception of wrong. But Amleth is very much a man of his time. You probably

> won't like him … Robert Eggers and his co-writer Sjón, as well as the rest of the creative crew behind this film, deserve immense credit for refusing to even *try* making this society relatable to us. It makes us question our love for this culture, and reminds us of some of the reality that lay behind the beautiful ships and swords. For this alone, *The Northman* is a remarkable film. It is also beautifully filmed, intoxicatingly atmospheric, and features a sizzling soundtrack. I cannot recommend it enough … Final grade: A+"

Ultimately, *The Northman* shows us a living world, though very different and very frightening, something that will make us think more deeply about the people of the Viking Age—and perhaps about the aspects of ourselves that, for better or worse, we still recognise in them.

Acknowledgements

Saying 'thanks' to Terry Gunnell seems a ridiculously inadequate way to acknowledge nearly thirty years of conversation, humour, personal support, and the extraordinary gift of his shared ideas and intellectual journey into the dramatic past of the late Iron Age. Suffice to say that he is one of my most valued friends, and here's to many more years of the above; Terry, I hope to see you and Tobba again very soon. For the experience of *The Northman*, I extend my deep thanks to the director Robert Eggers (Terry, Robert says "happy birthday!"), with equally warm regards to Lars Knudsen, Sam Hanson, Sjón, Craig Lathrop, Linda Muir, Louise Ford, and Nille Glæsel, as well as to Garrett Bird, the props and armoury teams, and all the supportive folks at Focus Features and NBC/Universal, not least in connection with the premieres in London and Los Angeles. A friendly nod there to Willem Dafoe, Gustav Lindh, Oscar Novak, and Anya Taylor-Joy. Particular thanks to Alexander Skarsgård, who knows why. I would also like to acknowledge Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, not only for a fun collaboration as consultants on the film but also – on an unrelated matter – in salute to her courage, decency and integrity in trying circumstances. Two anonymous reviewers made valuable suggestions, my thanks to them. Lastly, I am grateful to Ingunn Ásdísardóttir and her fellow editors for the invitation to contribute to this celebratory volume, and for their patience with a broken deadline.

Bibliography

Abrams, S. 2022. *The Northman: A Call to the Gods*. Insight Editions.
Bek-Pedersen, K. 2011. *The Norns in Old Norse Mythology*. Dunedin.
Brink, S. 2021. *Thraldom: A History of Slavery in the Viking Age*. Oxford University Press.
Dale, R. 2022. *The Myths and Realities of the Viking* berserkr. Routledge.
Knight, S. 2022. "Spirit of the Age." *The New Yorker* 2022-04-04: 20–26.
Larrington, C. 2023. *The Norse Myths that Shape the Way We Think*. Thames & Hudson.
Price, N. 2019. *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. Oxbow.
———. 2020a. *Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings*. Basic.

———. 2020b. "My Vikings and *Real Vikings*: Drama, Documentary and Historical Consultancy." In *The Vikings Reimagined: Reception, Recovery, Engagement*, edited by T. Birkett and R. Dale, 28–43. DeGruyter.

———. 2022. "Performing the Vikings, from Edda to Oseberg." In *The Wild Hunt for Numinous Knowledge* (*Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74), edited by K. Bek-Pedersen, S. Bønding, L. J. Murphy, S. Nygaard, and M. Warmind, 63–88.

———. 2023. "Reclaiming the Vikings." *British Museum Magazine* 105: 54–57.

Rose, S. 2022. "Norse Code: Are White Supremacists Reading Too Much Into The Northman?" *The Guardian* 2022-04-22 https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/apr/22/norse-code-white-supremacists-reading-the-northman-robert-eggers.

Online reviews cited

Baldock, L. R. 2022. "*The Northman* review." *The Hollywood News* 2022-04-12 https://www.thehollywoodnews.com/2022/04/12/the-northman-review-dir-robert-eggers-2022/.

Bradshaw, P. 2022. "The Northman review." *The Guardian* 2022-04-11 https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/apr/11/the-northman-review-robert-eggers-hamlet-outrageous-violence.

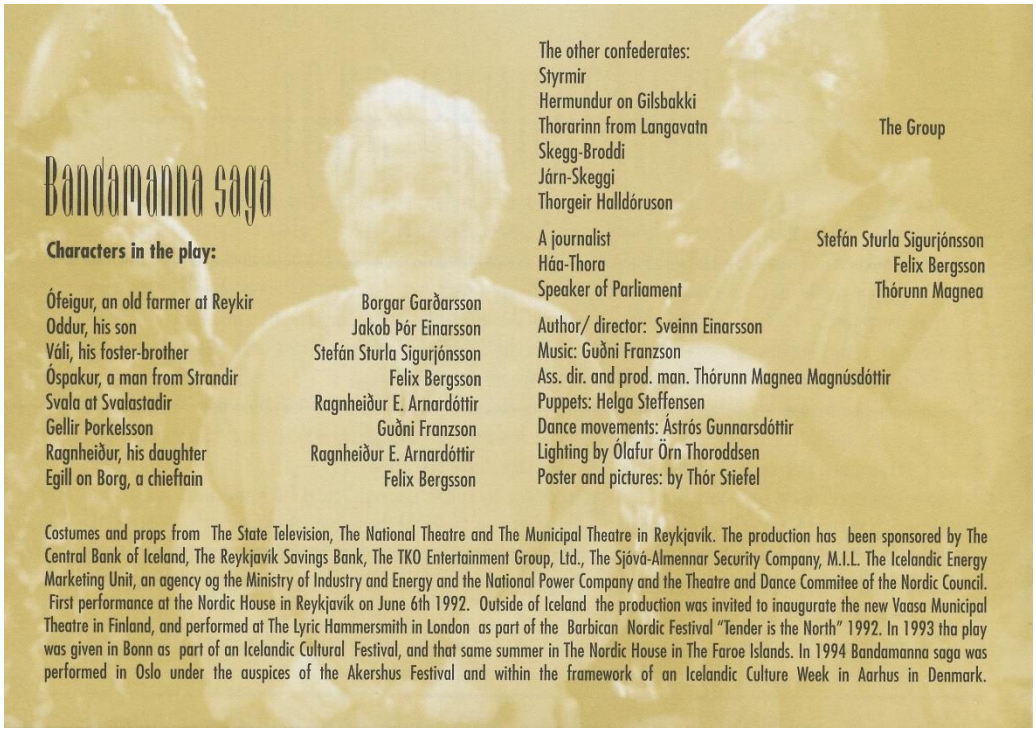
Leigh, D. 2022. "The Northman." *Financial Times* 2022-04-13 https://www.ft.com/content/67e3ab2c-e670-4248-9772-daa09e335ee0.

Nichols, C. 2022. "Film review: The Northman." *ScandinavianArchaeology.com* 2022-06-22 https://www.scandinavianarchaeology.com/film-review-the-northman/.

O'Sullivan, C. 2022. "The Northman movie review." *Evening Standard* 2022-04-13 https://www.standard.co.uk/culture/film/the-northman-movie-review-alexander-skarsgard-nicole-kidman-anya-taylor-joy-b993052.html.

GÓÐAR HUGSANIR FRÁ BANDAMÖNNUM

Sveinn Einarsson


Bandamanna saga
Characters in the play:
Ófeigur, an old farmer at Reykir — Borgar Garðarsson
Oddur, his son — Jakob Þór Einarsson
Váli, his foster-brother — Stefán Sturla Sigurjónsson
Óspakur, a man from Strandir — Felix Bergsson
Svala at Svalastadir — Ragnheiður E. Arnardóttir
Gellir Þorkelsson — Guðni Franzson
Ragnheiður, his daughter — Ragnheiður E. Arnardóttir
Egill on Borg, a chieftain — Felix Bergsson
The other confederates:
Styrmir
Hermundur on Gilsbakki
Thorarinn from Langavatn
Skegg-Broddi
Járn-Skeggi
Thorgeir Halldóruson
The Group
A journalist — Stefán Sturla Sigurjónsson
Háa-Thora — Felix Bergsson
Speaker of Parliament — Thórunn Magnea
Author/ director: Sveinn Einarsson
Music: Guðni Franzson
Ass. dir. and prod. man. Thórunn Magnea Magnúsdóttir
Puppets: Helga Steffensen
Dance movements: Ástrós Gunnarsdóttir
Lighting by Ólafur Örn Thoroddsen
Poster and pictures: by Thór Stiefel
Costumes and props from The State Television, The National Theatre and The Municipal Theatre in Reykjavik. The production has been sponsored by The Central Bank of Iceland, The Reykjavik Savings Bank, The TKO Entertainment Group, Ltd., The Sjóvá-Almennar Security Company, M.I.L. The Icelandic Energy Marketing Unit, an agency og the Ministry of Industry and Energy and the National Power Company and the Theatre and Dance Commitee of the Nordic Council. First performance at the Nordic House in Reykjavik on June 6th 1992. Outside of Iceland the production was invited to inaugurate the new Vaasa Municipal Theatre in Finland, and performed at The Lyric Hammersmith in London as part of the Barbican Nordic Festival "Tender is the North" 1992. In 1993 tha play was given in Bonn as part of an Icelandic Cultural Festival, and that same summer in The Nordic House in The Faroe Islands. In 1994 Bandamanna saga was performed in Oslo under the auspices of the Akershus Festival and within the framework of an Icelandic Culture Week in Aarhus in Denmark.

Leikflokkurinn Bandamenn varð til á fögrum vormorgni. Norrræna húsið í Reykjavík langaði að taka þátt í Listahátíð í Reykjvík 1992 en hún féll einmitt saman við norrænu leiklistarhátíðina sem einnig var haldin í Reykjavík þetta bjarta vor. Markmiðið var að draga fram leikræn eigindi okkar forna menningararfs og kynna með nútímalegum framsetningaraðferðum. Þetta hafði lengi verið hugsýn bæði fræðimanna og listamanna. Einn helsti hvatamaðurinn var Terry Gunnell. Bandamenn störfuðu nokkuð samfellt í áratug. Meginsýningarnar voru þrjár. Fyrst kom póstmódern útgáfa af Bandamanna sögu – þaðan kom nafnið – og fjallaði um völd, græðgi og stjórnmálalega spillingu. Næst

kom Amlóða saga, frjálsleg meðferð flestra þekktra heimilda, – þeirra á meðal íslenskra – um Danaprins fyrir Shakespeare – í kjarna sínum einnig pólitísk saga, sögð með ýmsum eldgömlum leikhefðum. Þriðja stórsýningin var svo edda.ris, eins konar afbygging á Skírnismálum Eddukvæða, þar sem hallmælt var árásargirni og nýlendukúgun. Við bættist svo, einkum í leiklestrarformi, flutningur á ýmsum gömlum lítt þekktum leikritum, Lilju Eysteins, þjóðkvæðum og meira að segja Mannréttindayfirlýsingu Sameinuðu þjóðanna. Allt efni flutt á íslensku. Stemmur og vikivakar. Sumt orðið til fyrir sjö hundruð árum. Og smám saman varð Terry með alla sína þekkingu og alla sína hvatningu eins konar verndari hópsins. Hann meira að segja þýddi Amlóðasögu sem fylgdi sýningunni í bæklingi í ferðum um þrjár heimsálfur.

Undir hálfrökkri ágústtrjáa hafa nú Bandamennn haldið sína minningar-hittinga í tvo áratugi. Þar hafa þau Terry og hans góða kona setið í fögnuði með Sveini Einarssyni og öllum þeirra góðu félögum og rifjað upp ævintýrið. En hér rifjum við upp með þakklæti ævintýrið um Terry Gunnell sem kom af Bretlandi til Íslands til að auðga íslenskt menningarlíf.

Semsé: Þakklætiskveðja með góðum hugsunum frá Bandamönnum og bandamönnum þeirra.

THE WORKS OF TERRY GUNNELL

1983

On the Icelandic playwright, Oddur Björnsson. In the programme for the play *Eftir konsertinn* by Oddur Björnsson. Icelandic National Theatre.

1985

William Golding og arfur mannsins. Transl. Garðar Baldvinsson. *Morgunblaðið C - Menning og listir*, March 10th: 6–8.

1986

Spelling by Computer. *Málfríður*, 2(1): 26–28.

1993

Skírnisleikur og Freysmál: Endurmat eldri hugmynda um "forna norræna helgileika." Transl. Jón Karl Helgason. *Skírnir*, 167: 421–459.

[Brochure] *The Pagan Religion of the Vikings on Sognefjord*. Sognefjord Vikingsenter.

1994

Bury my heart in stofa 31 – Áfanginn MAN 113 í Menntaskólanum við Hamrahlíð [with Sigurður Hjartarson and Björn Bergsson]. *Ný menntamál* 12(4): 19–23.

Grýla, Grýlur, Grøleks and Skeklers: Folk Drama in the North Atlantic in the Early Middle Ages? *Samtíðarsögur: Níunda Alþjóðlega fornsagnaþingið: forprent / The Contemporary Sagas: The Ninth International Saga Conference: Preprints*: *Akureyri, 31 July-–6 August 1994*, I 259–273.

Spássíukrot? Mælendamerkingar í handritum eddukvæða og miðaldaleikrita. *Skáldskaparmál* 3: 7–29.

1995

The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer.

E-mail som middel til at gøre døde ord levende: Om computer kontakt mellem nordamerikanske indianere og islandske elever [with Sigurður Hjartarson and Björn Bergsson]. Transl. Ida Simey. *Skolen i Norden* 1: 13–14.

The Play of Skírnir: A New Look at The Old Idea of "Ancient Scandinavian Drama." *Nordic Theatre Studies 7*: 21–35. (Shortened English version of "Skírnisleikur og Freysmál"). Repr. in the programme book *Edda Eins: Geschichten und Gesänge aus dem Norden*, ed. Ulrich Mehler, 65–78. Amphitheater, 39. Echternach.

[Review]. Sveinn Einarsson. Íslensk leiklist I. *Nordic Theatre Studies* 7: 89–91.

1996

Language Master [with Hildigunnur Halldórsdóttir]. Reykjavík: Námsgagnastofnun.

The Rights of the Player. *Comparative Drama* 30 (Spring): 1–31.

[Review] La Farge and Tucker. Glossary to the Poetic Edda. *Saga-Book* 24: 191–194.

1997

[Editor] *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders: Including 49 Tales*. 5 vols. General ed. Viðar Hreinsson. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Leifs Eiríkssonar. 2nd ed. 2000 (selection).

[Translation] Halldórs þáttur Snorrasonar II. *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders: Including 49 Tales*. 5 vols. General ed. Viðar Hreinsson, vol. 5, 223–230. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Leifs Eiríkssonar. 2nd ed. 2000.

[Translation] Hrafnkels saga. *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders: Including 49 Tales*. 5 vols. General ed. Viðar Hreinsson, vol. 5, 261–281. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Leifs Eiríkssonar. 2nd ed. 2000.

[Translation] Þiðranda þáttur og Þórhalls. *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders: Including 49 Tales*. 5 vols., general ed. Viðar Hreinsson, vol. 2, 459–462. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfa Leifs Eiríkssonar.

1998

Dame Bertha Phillpotts and the Search for Scandinavian Drama. *Anglo-Scandinavian Cross-Currents 1850–1914*, ed. Inga-Stina Ewbank, 84–105. Norwich: Norvik Press.

The Return of Sæmundur: Origins and Analogues. *Þjóðlíf og þjóðtrú: Ritgerðir helgaðar Jóni Hnefli Aðalsteinssyni*, eds. Terry Gunnell, Valdimar Tr. Hafstein, Ögmundur Helgason and Jón Jónsson, 87–111. Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga.

[Editor] *Þjóðlíf og þjóðtrú: Ritgerðir helgaðar Jóni Hnefli Aðalsteinss*yni, eds. Terry Gunnell, Ögmundur Helgason, Valdimar Tr. Hafstein and Jón Jónsson. Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga.

[Translation] Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson. *A Piece of Horse Liver: Myth, Ritual and Folklore in Old Icelandic Sources*, [with Joan Turville-Petre]. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan; Félagsvísindastofnun.

1999

The Myth as Dramatic Performance: Remnants of Pagan Ritual in the Poetic Edda. *Perspectives on Mythology*, ed. Esi Sutherland-Addy, 37–48. Accra: The Goethe Institute.

Öskrað í gegnum glerið. *Heimur kvikmyndanna*, ed. Guðni Elísson, 397–410. Reykjavík: Forlagið.

Folkloristics in Iceland Anno Domini 1999. *NNF Newsletter* 1/1999: 1-3.

Theatrical Events Revisited – A Response. *Nordic Theatre Studies* 12: 23–29.

[Translation] Appendix. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson. *Under the Cloak: A Pagan Ritual Turning Point in the Conversion of Iceland.* Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan; Félagsvísindastofnun.

2000

Enn er rýnt í gullnar töflur: Nýjar rannsóknir á norrænni goðafræði í aldarlok. *Skírnir* 174: 186–214.

From Grímnismál to Graffiti: Themes and Approaches in 100 Years of Icelandic Folkloristics. *Norden og Europa: Fagtradisjoner i nordisk etnologi og folkloristikk: Den 28. nordiske etnolog- og folkloristkongress, Hankø, mai 2000,* eds. Bjarne Rogan and Bente Gullveig Alver, 92–102. Oslo: Novus.

Galdramenn, gufa og útigangsbörn: Alþjóðlegar flökkusagnir um svartadauða á Íslandi. *Rannsóknir í Félagsvísindum III*, eds. Friðrik H. Jónsson and Ingjaldur Hannibalsson, 395–407. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindadeild Háskóla Íslands.

The Season of the Dísir: The Winter Nights and the Dísarblót in Early Scandinavian Belief. *Cosmos* 16: 117–149.

[Review] Islanders and Water-Dwellers. *Béaloideas* 68: 198–207.

2001

Framing the False Face: Analysing Disguise Traditions. *Pathways: Approaches to the Study of Folklore*, eds. Ulrika Wolf-Knuts and Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, 47–65. NNF publications 9. Turku: Nordic Network of Folklore.

Grýla, Grýlur, "Grøleks" and Skeklers: Medieval Disguise Traditions in the North Atlantic? *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 57: 33–54.

Mists, Magicians and Murderous Children: International Migratory Legends Concerning the "Black Death" in Iceland. *Northern Lights: Following Folklore in North Western Europe: Essays in Honour of Bo Almqvist*, ed. Séamas Ó Catháin, 47–59. Dublin: University College; Dublin Press.

[Review] Hermann Pálsson. Völuspá: The Sibyl's Prophecy. *Leeds Studies in English* 32: 295–300.

2002

„Komi þeir sem koma vilja …": Sagnir um innrás óvætta á jólum til forna á íslenska sveitabæi. *Úr manna minnum: Greinar um íslenskar þjóðsögur,* eds. Baldur Hafstað and Haraldur Bessason, 191–209. Reykjavík: Heimskringla.

2003

Dimission: Nútímabúningasiðir í íslenskum skólum. *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum IV. Félagsvísindadeild. Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í febrúar 2003*, ed. Friðrik H. Jónsson, 471–480. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Hof, höll, goð(ar) and dvergar: Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic skáli. *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference, Bonn, Germany, 28th July –– 2nd August 2003*, eds. Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer, 187–197. Bonn: Universität Bonn.

Islands and Narratives. *Journal of Indian Folkloristics* 5(1): 185–189.

Waking the 'Wiggle-Waggle' Monsters (Animal Figures and Cross-Dressing in the Icelandic Vikivaki Games). *Folk Drama Studies Today: The International Traditional Drama Conference 2002*, eds. Eddie Cass and Peter Millington, 207–225. Sheffield: University of Sheffield.

[Review] John Shaw, Brígh an Órain. A Story in Every Song. *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folkore* 59: 266–271.

2004

The Coming of the Christmas Visitors: Folk Legends Concerning the Attacks on Icelandic Farmhouses Made by Spirits at Christmas. *Northern Studies* 38: 51–75.

Eddic Poetry. *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, 82–100. Oxford: Blackwell. Publ. 2007 in Japanese in *Eureka: Poetry and Criticism* (2007): 121–137. Transl. Tsukusu Jinn Itó.

Hof, Halls, Goðar and Dwarves: An Examination of the Ritual Space in the Pagan Icelandic Hall. *Cosmos* 17: 3–36.

Íslenski sagnagrunnurinn. *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum* V, ed. Úlfar Hauksson, 611–619. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

Newall (née Phillpotts), Dame Bertha Surtees (1877–1932): Educationist and Scandinavian Scholar. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. www.oxforddnb.com/search?q=Newall%2C+Dame+Bertha+Surtees+%281877%E2%80%931932%29.

[Review] Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj. Riddles: Perspectives on the Use, Function and Change in a Folklore Genre. *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 60: 256–260.

[Review] Jacqueline Simpson. Folklore of Sussex. *Folklore* 115(3): 369–370.

2005

An Invasion of Foreign Bodies: Legends of Washed Up Corpses in Iceland. *Eyðvinur: Heiðursrit til Eyðun Andreassen*, eds. Malan Marnersdóttir, Jens Cramer and Arnfinnur Johansen, 70–79. Tórshavn: Føroyja Fróðskaparfelag.

Island. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Folklore and Folklife,* III: *Europe*, ed. William M. Clements, 111–123. Connecticut: Westport.

[Review] Jacqueline Simpson. Icelandic Folktales and Legends. *Saga-Book* 29: 153–156.

2006

Busar, böðlar og jamberingar: Innvígsluathafnir í íslenskum framhaldsskólum. *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum VII: Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í október 2006*, ed. Úlfar Hauksson, 823–833. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

How Elvish Were the Álfar? *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: The 13th International Saga Conference Durham and York, 6th–12th August 2006* I, eds. John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kirk, 321–328.Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.

Innrás hinna utanaðkomandi dauðu. *Sjöunda landsbyggðarráðstefna Sagnfræðingafélags Íslands og Félags þjóðfræðinga á Íslandi haldin á Eiðum 3.–5. júni 2005: Ráðstefnurit: Fylgirit Múlaþings 33*, ed. Hrafnkell Lárusson, 47–54. Egilsstaðir: Héraðsnefnd Múlasýslna; Sagnfræðingafélag Íslands.

New Seeds for the Future: Final Comments. *First International Conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year (Malta 20–24, 2005): Proceedings*, ed. George Mifsud-Chircop, 525–525. Malta: University of Malta Junior College.

Ritual Space, Ritual Year, Ritual Gender: A View of the Old Norse and New Icelandic Ritual Year. *First International Conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year (Malta 20-24, 2005): Proceedings*, ed. George Mifsud-Chircop, 285–302. Malta: University of Malta Junior College.

‚Til holts ek gekk': Spacial and Temporal Aspects of the Dramatic Poems of the Elder Edda. *Old Norse Religion in Long Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes and Interactions: An International Conference in Lund, Sweden 3–7 júni, 2004*, eds. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere, 238–242. Lund: University of Lund.

[Review] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson. The Folk-Stories of Iceland. Trans. Benedikt Benedikz. Ed. Anthony Faulkes. Viking Society for Northern Research. *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 61: 209–214.

2007

Beating the Line: Borderline Aspects of Shetland and Faroese Guising Traditions. *Border Crossing: Mumming in Cross-Border and Cross-Community Contexts; Proceedings of a Conference held the Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster, Derry, 9-–3 June 2003*, eds. Antony D. Buckley, Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, Séamas Ó Catháin, and Séamas Mac Mathúna, 102–132. Dundalk: Dundalgan Press.

Carnival in the Classroom: Icelandic Pre-Graduation Mumming Traditions at Upper-Secondary Level. *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area*, ed. Terry Gunnell, 705–722. Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademie.

Final Words. *The Ritual Year and Ritual Diversity: Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year, Gothenburg, June 7–11 2006*, eds. Lina Midholm and Annika Nordström, 349–350. Göteborg: Institutet för språk och folkminnen; Dialekt-, ortnamns- och folkminnesarkivet i Göteborg.

Initiation Traditions in Icelandic Gymnasia. *The Ritual Year and Ritual Diversity: Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the SIEF Working Group on the Ritual Year, Gothenburg, June 7-–1 2006*, eds. Lina Midholm and Annika Nordström, 287–

297. Göteborg: Institutet för språk och folkminnen; Dialekt-, ortnamns- och folkminnesarkivet i Göteborg.

How Elvish Were the Álfar? *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T. A. Shippey*, eds. Andrew Wawn, Graham Johnson and John Walter, 111–130. Turnhout: Brepols.

Introduction. *Hildur, Queen of the Elves and Other Icelandic Legends*, retold by J. M. Bedell, 1–26. Northampton: Interlink Books.

Introduction. *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area*, ed. Terry Gunnell, 27–43. Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademie.

Íslenzkir þjóðhættir: alþjóðlega samhengið. *Sú þrá að þekkja og nema …: Greinar um og eftir séra Jónas Jónasson frá Hrafnagili*, ed. Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir, 24–37. Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn.

Masks and Mumming Traditions in the North Atlantic: A Survey. *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area*, ed. Terry Gunnell, 275–326. Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademie.

Teater och drama i äldsta tid. *Ny svensk teaterhistoria, I: Teater före 1800,* eds. Tomas Forser and Sven Åke Heed, 13–36. Hedemora: Gidlunds förlag.

Viking religion: Old Norse Mythology. *Beowulf and Other Stories: A New Introduction to Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures*, eds. Richard North and Joe Allard, 351–275. Harlow: Pearson.

"Það er til fleira á himni og jörðu, Hóras": Kannanir á íslenskri þjóðtrú og trúarviðhorfum 2006-2007. *Rannsóknir í Félagsvísindum VIII: Félagsvísindadeild: Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í desember 2007*, ed. Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson, 801–812. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun.

[Editor] *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area*. Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademie.

[Review] Arne Bugge Amundsen et al, (eds). Ritualer: Kulturhistoriske Studier. *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 63: 219–223.

[Review] John McKinnell. Meeting the Other in Old Norse Myth and Legend. *Saga-Book* 31: 101–105.

[Translation] *Hildur, Queen of the Elves and Other Icelandic Legends*, retold by J. M. Bedell. Northampton: Interlink Books.

2008

The Hidden People of Iceland [with Brian Pilkington]. Reykjavík: Mál og menning.

August Strindberg. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales* III, ed. Donald Haase, 927–928. Connecticut: Westport.

Brot úr viðtölum við börn sagnakonunnar "Rosie Thurstone" í Árósum og í Reykjavík [with Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson and Júlíana Þ. Magnúsdóttir]. *Rósaleppar : þæfðir Rósu Þorsteinsdóttur fimmtugri 12. ágúst 2008*, eds. Gísli Sigurðsson, Ólöf Benediktsdóttir and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 52–55. Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen.

Elves. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales* I, ed. Donald Haase, 293–294. Connecticut: Westport.

Introduction. *Legends and Landscape*, ed. Terry Gunnell, 13–24. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

The Kenyan Dance Drama: An Active Force of Social Change. *Kritikkens dimensioner: Festskrift til Tomas Forser*, eds. Åsa Arping and Mats Jansson, 216–230. Stockholm; Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokforlög Symposion.

The Performance of the Poetic Edda. *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink, in collaboration with Neil Price, 299–203. London; New York: Routledge.

Þjóðfræði, þjóðleikhús og mótun sjónrænnar þjóðarímyndar: Sigurður Guðmundsson, Indriði Einarsson og álfabrennurnar. *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum IX: Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í október 2008*, eds. Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson and Helga Björnsdóttir, 775–785. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun.

[Editor] *Legends and Landscape: Articles based on Plenary Lectures Presented at the 5th Celtic-Nordic-Baltic Folklore Symposium, Reykjavík, 2005*. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press.

2009

Ansgar's Conversion of Iceland. *Pre-prints: The 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, Sweden, 9–15th August 2009*, eds. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, 346–353. Gävle: Gävle University Press.

Heima á milli: Þjóðtrú og þjóðsagnir á Íslandi við upphaf 21 aldar. *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum: Félags og mannvísindadeild: Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í október 2009*, eds. Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson and Helga Björnsdóttir, 899–907. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Iceland: Wolverhampton of the North. *Wawnarstræti (alla leið til Íslands) lagt Andrew Wawn 65 ára, 27. oktober 2009*, eds. Robert Cook, Terry Gunnell, Margrét Eggertsdóttir and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, 35–38. Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen.

Legends and Landscape in the Nordic Countries. *Cultural and Social History* 6 (3): 305–322.

Myter og miljø / Myytit ja ymäristö/ Legends and Environments. *Hvat er með ásum: Föredrag på Nordisk hovedstadsmøde, Reykjavík September 2007*, ed. Unnar Stefánsson, 43–50; 107–114; 173–180. Reykjavík: Norræna félagið.

The Stand-Up of Tales. *30 Gíslar teknir fyrir hönd Gísla Sigurðssonar, 27 september 2009*, eds. Baldur Sigurðsson, Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 77–79. Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen.

'There is Nothing Like a Dame!' Cross Dressing in Mumming Activities Past and Present. *Cosmos* 25: 209–217.

[Editor] *Wawnarstræti (alla leið til Íslands) lagt Andrew Wawn 65 ára, 27. oktober 2009*, eds. Robert Cook, Terry Gunnell, Margrét Eggertsdóttir and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir. Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen.

2010

Ansgar's Conversion of Iceland. *Scripta Islandica* 60: 105–118.

Daisies Rise to Become Oaks: The Politics of Early Folktale Collection in Northern Europe. *Folklore* 121(1): 12–37.

Hve hár var hinn hávi? Hlutverk Óðins í íslensku samfélagi fyrir kristnitöku. *Þjóðarspegill 2010: Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XI (Þjóðfræði)*, eds. Gunnar Þór Jóhannesson and Helga Björnsdóttir, 294–303. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Introduction: Performance Stages of the Nordic World. *Ethnologia Europaea* 40 (2): 5–13.

Sagnagrunnur: A New Database of Icelandic Legends in Print. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 45: 151–162.

[Review] Michael A. Lange. The Norwegian Scots: An Anthropological Interpretation of Viking-Scottish Identity in the Orkney Islands. *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 40: 169–171.

2011

The Drama of the Poetic Edda: Performance as a Means of Transformation. *Pogranicza teatralności: Poezja, poetyka, praktyka,* ed. Andrzeja Dąbrówki, 13-–40. Studia Staropolskie, Series Nova. Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Pan Wydawnictwo.

Prestlærðir safnarar þjóðsagna á 19. öld. *Þjóðarspegill 2011: Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XI (Þjóðfræði)*, eds. Ása Guðný Ásgeirsdóttir, Helga Björnsdóttir and Helga Ólafs, 598–605. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

2012

Clerics as Collectors of Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Iceland. *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 68: 45–66.

Jacqueline Simpson: An Appreciation. *Jacqueline Simpson, Studies in English and Scandinavian Folklore: Selected Articles from Folklore presented to the author for her 80th birthday*, eds. Patricia Lysaght and James Grayson, vii–xiv. London: The Folklore Society.

Kraftur staðarins: Íslenskar sagnir um álagabletti í samanburði við erlendar sagnir. *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XIII. Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í október 2012 (Félags- og mannvísindadeild)*, eds. Sveinn Eggertsson and Ása G. Ásgeirsdóttir, 1–9. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Masks and Performance in the Early Nordic World. *Masken der Vorzeit in Europa (II): International Tagung vom 19. bis. 21. November in Halle (Saale)*, eds. Harald Meller and Regine Maraszek, 185–196. Halle (Saale): Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt.

National Folklore, National Drama and the Creation of Visual National Identity: The Case of Jón Árnason, Sigurður Guðmundsson and Indriði Einarsson in Iceland. *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin, 301–323. National Cultivation of Culture 4. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

The Relationship Between Icelandic Knattleikur and Early Irish Hurling. *Sean, nua agus síoraíocht: Féilscribhinn in ómós do Dháithí Ó hÓgáin*, eds. Ríonach uí Ógáin, William Nolan and Éamonn Ó hÓgáin, 386–396. Dublin: Coisecéim.

The Relationship Between Icelandic Knattleikur and Early Irish Hurling (extended). *Béaloideas* 80: 52–69.

Skotrarar, Skudlers, Colloughs and Strawboys: Wedding Guising Traditions in Norway, Shetland and Ireland, Past and Present. *Atlantic Currents: Essays on Lore, Literature and Language: Essays in Honour of Séamas Ó Catháin on Occasion of His 70th Birthday, 31.12.2012*, eds. Bo Almqvist, Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, Liam Mac Mathúna, Séamas Mac Mathúna and Seosamh Watson, 241–268. Dublin: University College Dublin Press.

Waking the Dead: Folk Legends Concerning Magicians and Walking Corpses in Iceland. *News from Other Worlds: Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology and Culture (In Honour of John Lindow)*, eds. Merrill Kaplan and Timothy R. Tangherlini, 235–266. Wildcat Canyon Advanced Seminars, Occasional Monograph Series 1. Berkeley; Los Angeles: North Pinehurst Press.

2013

Eingyðistrú eða fjölgyðis? Var almenn trú á samfélag guða á Norðurlöndum fyrir kristnitöku? *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XIV. Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í október 2013*, eds. Helga Ólafsdóttir and Thamar Melanie Heijstra, 1–10. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Folklore och Performance Studies – en introduktion [with Owe Ronström]. *Folkloristikens aktuella utmaningar: Vänbok till Ulf Palmenfelt*, eds. Owe Rönström, Georg Drakos and Jonas Engman, 21–55. Visby: Högskolan på Gotland.

From One High One to Another: The Acceptance of Óðinn as Preparation for the Acceptance of God. *Conversions: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Leszek Słupecki and Rudolf Simek, 153–178. Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia,23. Vienna: Fassbaender.

The Significance of the Work and Collections of the School of Scottish Studies from a Scandinavian Viewpoint. *The Carrying Stream Flows On: Celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the School of Scottish Studies*, ed. Bob Chambers, 199–225. Kershade: The Islands Book Trust.

Vǫluspá in Performance. *The Nordic Apocalypse Approaches to 'Vǫluspá' and Nordic Days of Judgement*, eds. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen, 63–77. Turnhout: Brepols.

Why Should Students Read "Dead" Legends? *Arv: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore* 69: 171–176.

[Editor] *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to 'Vǫluspá' and Nordic Days of Judgement*, ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen. Turnhout: Brepols.

2014

Billy Connolly, Jo Brand and Tommy Tiernan: Stand-Ups and Storytellers. *Narratives Across Space and Time: Transmissions and Adaptations: Proceedings of the 15th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (June 21–June 27 Athens)* I, ed.

Aikaterinē Polymerou-Kamēlakē, 317–335. Athens: Academy of Athens, Hellenic Folklore Research.

Foreword. *The Poetic Edda* translated by Jeramy Dodds, 8–11. Toronto: Coach House Books.

In Memoriam: Bo Almqvist (1931–2013). *Folklore* 125(2): 258–261.

"Magical Mooning" and the "Goatskin Twirl": "Other" Kinds of Female Magical Practices in Early Iceland. *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Intersections, and Institutions*, ed. Timothy R. Tangherlini, 133–153. The Wildcat Canyon Advanced Seminars: Mythology 1. Berkeley; Los Angeles: North Pinehurst Press.

Modern Legends in Iceland. *Narratives Across Space and Time: Transmissions and Adaptations: Proceedings of the 15th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (June 21–June 27 Athens)* I, ed. Aikaterinē Polymerou-Kamēlakē, 337–351. Athens: Academy of Athens, Hellenic Folklore Research.

Nordic Folk Legends, Folk Traditions and Grave Mounds: The Value of Folkloristics for the Study of Old Nordic Religions. *New Focus on Retrospective Methods: Resuming Methodological Discussions: Case Studies from Northern Europe*, eds. Eldar Heide and Karen Bek-Pedersen, 17–41. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.

Prologue. *Maske og forklædning i Danmark*, eds. Inge Adriansen and Carsten Bregenhøj, 13. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

The Vampire Returns to Britain: Considering the Images of Vampires, Werewolves and Ghosts in BBC's Being Human. *Þjóðarspegillinn: Rannsóknir í Félagsvísindum XV: Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í oktober 2014*, eds. Helga Ólafsdóttir and Thamar M. Heijstra, 1–9. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

[Review] Merrill Kaplan. Thou Fearful Guest. *Scripta Islandica* 64: 123–128.

2015

The Background and Nature of the Annual and Occasional Rituals of the Ásatrúarfélag in Iceland. *Magic and Rituals and Rituals in Magic*, ed. Tatiana Minniyakhmetova and Kamila Velkoborská, 28–40. The Ritual Year 10. Innsbruck; Tartu: ELM Scholarly Press.

Helgi verður til: Bakgrunnur, tilurð og þróun helgiathafna og helgisiða Ásatrúarfélagsins. *Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XVI: Erindi flutt á ráðstefnu í október 2015 Félags- og mannvísindadeild*. eds. Helga Ólafs and Thamar M. Heijstra, 1–7. Reykjavík: Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands.

Jón Árnason. *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. Joep Leersen. Amsterdam: Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalism. http://romanticnationalism.net/

Magnús Grímsson. *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. Joep Leersen. Amsterdam: Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalism. http://romanticnationalism.net/

Ólafur Davíðsson. *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, ed. Joep Leersen. Amsterdam: Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalism. http://romanticnationalism.net/

Oral Literature: Icelandic. *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Eur*ope, ed. Joep Leersen. Amsterdam: Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalism. http://romantic nationalism.net/

Pantheon? What Pantheon? Concepts of a Family of Gods in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions. *Scripta Islandica* 66: 55–76.

Umsjónarkerfi í þjóðfræði. *Tímarit Kennslumiðstöðvar Háskóla Íslands* 4 (1): 8–9.

2016

The Development and Role of the Fjallkona (Mountain Woman) in Icelandic National Day Celebrations and Other Contexts. *Traditions and Transformation*, eds. Guzel Stolyarova, Irina Sedakova, and Nina Vlaskina, 22–40. The Ritual Year 11. Moscow: Kazan.

Eddic Performance and Eddic Audiences. *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, eds. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Britanny Schorn, 92–113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Obraz Povelitel'nitsy gory (Fjallkonan) v islandskoi natsional'noi traditsii [The image of the Mountain Woman (Fjallkonan) in the Icelandic National Tradition], transl. Irina Sedakova and Nina Vlaskina. *Zhivaia Starina* 4: 34–37.

2017

Blótgyðjur, Goðar, Mimi, Incest, and Wagons: Oral Memories of the Religion(s) of the Vanir. *Old Norse Mythology: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Pernille Hermann, Stephen A. Mitchell, and Jens Peter Schjødt, with Amber J. Rose, 114–137. Publications of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature 3. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

From Sagen to Translated Sagnir: A Previously Uncharted Chapter in the Evolution of the Icelandic Fjallkona. *Skandinavische Schriftlandschaften: Vänbok til Jürg Glauser*, eds. Klaus Müller-Wille, Kate Heslop, Anna Katharina Richter and Lukas Rösli, 228–232. Beiträge zur Nordischen Philologie 59. Tübingen: Nar Franke Attempto Verlag.

How High Was the High One? The Roles of Odinn and Tórr in Pre-Christian Icelandic Society. *Theorizing Old Norse Myth*, eds. Stefan Brink and Lisa Collinson, 105–129. Acta Scandinavica 7. Turnhout: Brepols.

Inngangur, og Stiklur úr ævi Sigurðar Guðmundssonar málara [with Karl Aspelund]. *Málarinn og menningarsköpun: Sigurður Guðmundsson og Kvöldfélagið*, eds. Karl Aspelund and Terry Gunnell, 11–27. Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands; Opna.

On the Border: The Liminality of the Seashore in Icelandic Folk Legends. *Northern Atlantic Islands and the Sea: Seascapes and Dreamscapes*, eds. Andrew Jennings, Silke Reeploeg and Angela Watt, 10–31. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Sagnagrunnur: En kartlagt database over de islandske folkesagn. *Saga och sed* 2016: 15-40.

Sigurður Guðmundsson og þjóðsögurnar. *Málarinn og menningarsköpun: Sigurður Guðmundsson og Kvöldfélagið,* eds. Karl Aspelund and Terry Gunnell, 415–433. Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands; Opna.

Viðhorf landsmanna til ‚þjóðmenningar' og þjóðsagnasöfnunar. *Málarinn og menningarsköpun: Sigurður Guðmundsson og Kvöldfélagið*, eds. Karl Aspelund and Terry Gunnell, 235–247. Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands; Opna.

[Editor] *Málarinn og menningarsköpun: Sigurður Guðmundsson og Kvöldfélagið*, eds. Karl Aspelund and Terry Gunnell. Reykjavík: Þjóðminjasafn Íslands; Opna.

[Review] Tommy Kuusela. 'Hallen var lyst i helig frid'. Krig och fred mellan gudar och jätter i en fornnordisk hallmiljö. *Chaos* 68(2): 214–220.

2018

The Álfar, the Clerics, and the Enlightenment: Conceptions of the Supernatural in the Age of Reason in Iceland. *Fairies, Demons and Nature Spirits*, ed. Michael Ostlin, 191–212. Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic. London: Palgrave.

Background: Historical Context: Manners and Customs [with Joep Leerssen]. *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, 2 vols., ed. Joep Leerssen, I 69–71. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Early Representations of Old Nordic Religions in Drama. *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Vol. 1. From the Middle Ages to c. 1830*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, 421–446. Turnhout: Brepols.

Icelandic Traditions: Manners and Customs. *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, 2 vols., ed. Joep Leerssen, II 1081. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Icelandic Traditions: Oral Literature. *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, 2 vols., ed. Joep Leerssen, II 1079–1081. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Individuals: Jón Árnason. *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, 2 vols., ed. Joep Leerssen, I 368–370. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press).

Individuals: Magnús Grímsson. *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, 2 vols., ed. Joep Leerssen, I 425. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Individuals: Ólafur Davíðsson. *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*, 2 vols., ed. Joep Leerssen, I 467. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Ritual. *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies* I, eds. Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann and Stephen A. Mitchell, 677–687. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter.

Performance Studies. *Handbook of Pre-Modern Nordic Memory Studies* I, eds. Jürg Glauser, Pernille Hermann and Stephen A. Mitchell, 107–119. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter.

The Power in the Place Icelandic Álagablettir Legends in a Comparative Context. *Storied and Supernatural Places: Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas*, eds. Ülo Valk and Daniel Sävborg, 27–41. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 23. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.

Theatre and Performance (1830–2018) [with Sveinn Einarsson]. *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: Research and Reception, Vol. II: From c. 1830 to the Present*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, 227–264. Turnhout: Brepols.

2019

Folke Ström and kultdrama. *Religionshistorikern Folke Ström*, eds. Andreas Nordberg and Olof Sundqvist, 137–146. Uppsala: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien för svensk folkkultur.

Protest and Performance: The Pot and Pan Protests in Iceland. *Former som formar: Musik, kulturarv, öar: Festschrift till Owe Ronström*, eds. Camilla Asplund Ingemark, Carina Johansson and Oscar Pripp, 221–233. Skrifter från Etnologiska Avdelingen, Uppsala Universitet: Etnolore 38. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet.

Response [to Fredrik Wallenstein]: "What Does Óðinn Do to the Túnriðor? An Interpretation of Hávamál 155. *Myth, Materiality and Lived Religion in Merovingian and Viking Scandinavia*, eds. Klas Wikström af Edholm, Peter Jackson Rova, Andreás Nordberg, Olof Sundqvist and Torun Zachrison, 416–421. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press.

Spaces, Places and Liminality: Marking Out and Meeting the Dead and the Supernatural in Old Nordic Landscapes. *Landscape and Myth in North-Western Europe*, ed. Matthias Egler, 25–44. Borders, Boundaries and Landscapes 2. Turnhout: Brepols.

2020

Álfar (Elves). *Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures*, 4 vols., eds. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén, III 1571–1580. Turnhout: Brepols.

Dvergar (Dwarves). *Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures*, 4 vols., eds. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén, III 1559–1570. Turnhout: Brepols.

Folklore. *Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures*, 4 vols., eds. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén, I 195–204. Turnhout: Brepols.

The Goddesses in the Dark Waters. *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink*, eds. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist, and Declan Taggart, 243–265. Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe,32. Turnhout: Brepols.

Invisible Force: The Absence of Folk Legends about Snæfellsjökull. *Dreaming of a Glacier: Snæfellsjökull in a Geocritical Perspective*, eds. Matthias Egeler and Stefanie Gropper, 43–63. München: Utzverlag.

Performance Archaeology, Eiríksmál, Hákonarmál and the Study of Old Nordic Religions. *John Miles Foley's World of Oralities: Text, Tradition, and Contemporary Oral Theory*, ed. Mark C. Amodio, 137–153. Leeds: ARC Humanities Press.

2021

Axe in the Water: A Unique Magical Ritual in Ljósvetninga saga. *Myth, Magic and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture: Studies in Honour of Stephen A. Mitchell*, eds. Jürg Glauser and Pernille Hermann in collaboration with Stefan Brink and Joseph Harris, 175–184. Acta Scandinavica 11. Turnhout: Brepols.

George Marwick's Account of "The Muckle Tree or Igasill": Folklore or Literature? [with Tom Muir]. *Folklore and Old Norse Mythology*, eds. Frog and Joonas Ahola, 665–688. FF Communication 323. Helsinki: Kalevala Society.

Grimm Ripples: The Role of the Grimms' *Deutsche Sagen* in the Collection and Creation of National Folk Narratives in Northern Europe. *Folklore and Nation in Britain and Ireland*, eds. Matthew Cheeseman and Carina Hart, 22–47. Routledge Studies in Cultural History. New York: Routledge. (On-line version; Printed 2022).

The Myths of the Vanir and Seasonal Change in the North. *Res, Artes et Religio: Essays in Honour of Rudolf Simek*, eds. Sabine Heidi Walther, Regina Jucknies, Judith Meurer-Bongardt and Jens Eike Schnall, in collaboration with Birgitta Jaroschek and Sarah Onkels, 235–251. Leeds: Kismet Press.

The Rise of Chupa-Sangue in a World of "Fake News": Living Legends of Vampirism in Mozambique and Malawi. *Narrative culture* 8(2): 240–262.

2022

Eddic Poetry. *Oxford Bibliographies in Medieval Studies*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz. New York: Oxford University Press. https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195396584/obo9780195396584-0311.xml)

Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius and the Svenska sägner that Never Appeared [with Fredrik Skott]. *Grimm Ripples: The Legacy of the Grimms' Deutsche Sagen in Northern Europe*, ed. Terry Gunnell, 222–238. National Cultivation of Culture 30. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Introduction. *Grimm Ripples: The Legacy of the Grimms'* Deutsche Sagen *in Northern Europe*, ed. Terry Gunnell, 1–25. National Cultivation of Culture 30. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Introduction. *Old Norse Poetry in Performance*, eds. Brian McMahon and Annemari Ferreira, 1–15. Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies. London: Routledge.

Jón Árnason and the Collection of Icelandic Folk Legends: Ripples, Flotsam, Nets and Reflections. *Grimm Ripples: The Legacy of the Grimms'* Deutsche Sagen *in Northern Europe*, ed. Terry Gunnell, 385–419. National Cultivation of Culture 30. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Jubilee of Emily Lyle [with Irina Sedakova, Mare Kõiva, Laurent S. Fournier, Žilvytis Šaknys and Neill Martin]. *The Yearbook of Balkan and Baltic Studies* 5: 317–327.

Sigurður Guðmundsson and Jón Árnason's Icelandic Folktales. *Networks, Narratives and Nations: Transcultural Approaches to Cultural Nationalism in Modern Europe and Beyond*, eds. Marjet Brolsma, Alex Drace-Francis, Krisztina Lajosi, Enno Maessen, Marleen Rensen, Jan Rock, Yolanda Rodrígues Pérez, and Guido Snel, 147–155. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Three Women, Three Roots, Three Times, One Tree: Some Thoughts for Potential Gardeners. *The Wild Hunt for Numinous Knowledge: Perspectives On and From the Study of Old Norse Religions in Honour of Jens Peter Schjødt*, eds. Simon Nygaard, Luke Murphy and Karen Bek-Pedersen, 341–355. Aarhus: RvT.

[Editor] *Grimm Ripples: The Legacy of the Grimms'* Deutsche Sagen *in Northern Europe*. National Cultivation of Culture 30. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

2023

Dirk Johannsen, Professor in Oslo. *Ethnologia Scandinavica* 53: 163–164.

Folklore and Prophecy. *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*, eds. Leszek Gardeła, Sophie Bønding and Peter Pentz, 41–49. Oxford; Philadelphia: Oxbow Books.

The Magic of the Mask. *The Norse Sorceress: Mind and Materiality in the Viking World*, eds. Leszek Gardeła, Sophie Bønding and Peter Pentz, 505–515. Oxford; Philadelphia: Oxbow Books.

2024

Contact with the Dead in Iceland Past and Present: The Findings of a New Survey of Folk Belief and Experiences of the Supernatural in Iceland. *Religions* 15(6): 661.

High Seat Pillars and the Settlement of Iceland: Fact, Fake News or Folklore? *Northern Studies* 55: 1–24.

The Meaning of the Mamuthones: Tradition meets Heritage in the Highlands of Sardinia. *Journal of Folklore Research* 61(1): 1–37.

Per Gynt Meets the Trow of Windhouse. *History Maker: Essays in Honour of Brian Smith,* eds. Mark Smith and Ian Tate, 151–160. Lerwick: The Shetland Times.

Thomas Crofton Croker, *The Fairy Legends*, and the Arrival of the Illustrated Folk Legend in Northern Europe. *Irish University Review* 54(1): 101–111.

2025

1993: The Last Stand of Háa-Þóra Against the Authorities. *Aldingarður: ræktaður handa Aðalheiði Guðmundsdóttur sextugri 7. mars 2025,* eds. Ásta Kristín Benediktsdóttir and Romina Werth, 70–72. Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen.

Folk Beliefs and Experiences of the Supernatural: A Matter for Psychologists? *Yfirkennarinn: Afmælisrit til heiðurs Sigurði A. Grétarsyni, prófessor*, eds. Andri Steinþór Björnsson, Árni Kristjánsson, Heiða María Sigurðardóttir og Urður Njarðvík, 225–241. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

New Festivals in the Capital of Iceland 1998-2018. *Ritual Year* 13: 61–74.

Swedish Iconography of Drink-Bearer and Horse on the Northumbrian Franks Casket [with Marijane Osborn]. *Early Medieval England and its Neighbours* 51(12): 1–27.